WELL-BEING: THE LOOKING GLASS IN 4-D

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Abstract

Well-being affects all of us. It is intricately interwoven with our identity and interactions. This study explores the relational contexts in which well-being is created, maintained, and diminished. In order to accomplish this goal, three main themes were addressed: (a) the co-researcher's understanding of what well-being is, (b) the co-researcher's understanding of how community affects a person's well-being, and (c) a description of the co-researcher's best of times and worst of times. These phenomenological themes guide the context and process of this research.

This study is grounded in the theoretical stance of interpretivism with a constructionism epistemology; the methodology employed is phenomenological research utilizing conversational interviewing methods. I thematically analyzed the emergent capta from the interviews into the following themes: (a) *What is Well-Being?*: a definition of well-being and (b) *The Struggle in the Search:* co-researchers lived experiences of wellness. These themes offer an in-depth exploration of understanding the meaning of well-being and the lived experiences informing those understandings.

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Like many of my human brothers and sisters, I have a deep, yearning desire for happiness and well-being not only for myself but for others as well. Throughout my life, I have explored many different areas that contribute to a sense of wellness.

I am a professional massage therapist; working intimately with persons who have experienced great physical pain or discomfort I know that taking care of ourselves physically is important. I am an Interfaith Minister, and hold a Bachelor of Arts in Human Services; I work with people in all states of spiritual, emotional, and psychological connection and ennui. This, too, is an important contributor to one's quality of wellness.

Most recently, I am becoming a Communication scholar; learning and observing how interactions create the human worlds in which each of us live. These realizations have been socially, as well as spiritually, affirming as they indicate that not only are we more empowered to create wanted change, but we are also responsible for the social worlds we live in. Each and every one of us has the ability to not only change but to influence others in ways we are not always of consciously.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1 An Exploration of Well-Being

Before humans could write, they have sought understanding of the world around and within them. Since times of antiquity, humans have sojourned collectively and individually for broader and deeper knowledge and understanding regarding how they can make the best of their lives. From Jain Tirthankaras to ancient Chinese philosophers (i.e., Rishabh Dev, Confucius, Lao Tsu), from Gautama Buddha to classical Greek philosophers (i.e., Aristotle, Heraclitus, Socrates), from twentieth century theorists and philosophers (i.e., Buber, Jung, Maslow, Pearce, Rogers) to postmodern humanities studies, individuals and communities alike consistently seek to comprehend what constitutes a quality life.

Studies on happiness and well-being have risen to record highs over the last thirty years. This upsurge has gained the attention of many disciplines, contributing to an increasingly more interdisciplinary approach to the concepts and practices of well-being (Diener, Emmons, Larson, & Griffith, 1985; Helliwell, 2001, 2002; Putnam, 1995). Psychology led the research pack for many years, followed shortly by economics and anthropology. Currently, studies from disciplines as varied as communication, human geography and ecology are also in the mix. Modern academia has approached this subject with intensified impetus, resulting in the appearance of multiple journals and university departments worldwide focusing upon the study of human happiness, well-being and

quality of life (e.g., Journal of Happiness Studies, Consciousness Studies degree programs, Positive Psychology movement).

Expanding beyond academia, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and corporations have also taken great interest in studying well-being. Across the board, individuals, communities, and businesses are realizing that 'happy' people are less likely to commit crime, are more productive workers, are sick less often, get involved in local activities more often, and are generally more satisfied with their lives (Healy, Hampshire, Ayres, Ellwood, & Mengede, 2007; Helliwell, 2001, 2002; Pungo, 2005; Sarracino, 2009). Well-being studies show that wellness is an interdependent phenomenon with several factors consistently showing high levels of variance: adequate income in relation to local living norms, overall good health and access to quality health care, college education, spirituality and religiosity, and active social relationships (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002 [ABS]; Healy et al., 2007; Helliwell, 2001, 2002; Pungo, 2005; Sarracino, 2009).

This study will explore the myriad factors and influences affecting the co-researchers' understandings of well-being. The purpose of this study is to study the lived experiences of how one understands and experiences well-being within their active communities. This study will look at the multi-faceted layers of co-researchers' phenomenological experience and understanding of well-being through the context of community.

1.1.1 The Need for Exploring Well-Being in a Relational Context. The significance of feeling good about one's life, and the role that isolated factors and

systemic contexts play in influencing well-being has spurred many studies on this subject over the last several decades (Ayyash-Abdo & Alamuddin, 2007; Busseri, Sadava, & Deourville, 2007; Folgheraiter & Pasini, 2009; Goldstein, 2007; Jacob, Jovic, & Brinkerhoff, 2008; Moller, Theuns, Erstad, & Bernheim, 2007; Wills, 2009). Recent efforts focus on well-being within general populations of cultures worldwide (Kim & Kim, 2009; Moller et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2009; Wills, 2009), specific sample populations within those cultures (i.e., diseased, aged, poor) (Folgheraiter & Pasini, 2009; Suldo et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2009), measures to analyze well-being (Busseri et al., 2007; Moller, et al., 2007; Renger, Midyett, Soto Mas, & Erin, 2000; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), and specific domains potentially constituting well-being (Goldstein, 2007; Jacob et al., 2008; Kim & Kim, 2009; Watson et al., 1988; Wills, 2009).

Well-being has mainly been the academic property of psychology for the last hundred years. Diener et al. (1985) defines well-being as " a person's cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life . . . that includes experiencing pleasant emotions, low levels of negative moods, and a high life satisfaction" (p. 63). This definition was the impetus for creating Diener et al.'s Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS, 1985) in conjunction with Watson et al.'s Positive Affect Negative Affect Scale (PANAS, 1988) were the foundations for several decades of well-being research. These areas were considered to be products of static values such as demographic factors, personality traits, goals, values, attributions, relationships, life events, circumstances, and culture.

After a decade of well-being research, Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith (1999) embraced constructionism, proposing that well-being is a constructed concept, rather than

a reified 'thing' or a teleological end-state to be achieved (Leonardi, Spazzafumo, & Marcellini, 2005). Busseri et al., (2007) proposed that there are "higher order latent factors" (p. 414) that have yet to be explained or understood. Studying individuals' internal processes is necessary, yet it is not sufficient enough to explain or to understand how a person experiences the quality of who he or she is; relational contexts of local, familial, political, and geographical communities have proven to affect well-being in great measure. A review of extant literature demonstrates specific indicators representing significant amounts of variance in well-being, specifically, spirituality and social relations (Busseri et al., 2007; Folgheraiter & Pasini, 2009; Goldstein, 2007; Moller et al., 2007; Suldo et al., 2009; Wills, 2009).

However, in studying social relations researchers frequently overlook the nonsummative nature of relationships – including areas such as identity and community. While there is strong evidence that one's social context affects well-being and also strong evidence that social contexts shape identity, previous studies often examine 'static values' such as personality traits, habituation, thought patterns, displaced emotions, or attachment issues (Diener et al, 1999; 2002; Helliwell, 2001, 2002; Watson et al., 1988). Understanding these internal aspects of individuals may be useful in explaining part of humanity's experience of living, they do not provide a larger picture; for as humans, we do not live isolated, solely internal lives. Even islands need an ocean and other land masses to define them.

To provide a broader and deeper understanding of well-being, it behooves us to explore an "emergent self" (Richey & Brown, 2007); creating a synergistic plane of

intersubjectivity through one's interactions located within particular social and temporal contexts. This social constructionist model provides a more comprehensive lens to begin understanding well-being as it is actually experienced – in and through the context of our social relationships, our communities.

1.1.2 Well-Being: The Underlying Philosophy. There are, traditionally, two major schools of thought regarding happiness and well-being: (a) the hedonic school and, (b) the eudaimonic school. The proponents of the hedonic approach believe that humans are happy solely when engaging in behaviors that create pleasure and avoid pain (Helliwell, 2002; Sarracino, 2009; Wills, 2009); well-being is essentially a temporal string of pleasurable acts enacted in the present. Eudaimonia is a term coined by Aristotle, who suggests that well-being stems from the actualization of human potential (Helliwell, 2002). This view takes a more long-term approach to well-being than hedonism. Eudaimonia is autogenic, (i.e., happiness stems from doing an act itself), yet it is an accumulation of enacting virtuous actions that deepen one's understanding of human nature. In other words, eudaimonia is a lifetime of conscious acts of doing specifically human things (feeling, cognition, executive abilities) that lead one to live a virtuous life (Ring, Höfer, McGee, Hickey, & O'Boyle, 2006; Wills, 2009). For Aristotle, to act virtuously did not mean to "follow pre-established rules and norms"; it meant to act "with excellence in the right moment with the right person in the right form" (Wills, 2009, p. 55). Aristotle presents the working definition of the good life when he tells us that happiness "is the exercise of vital powers along lines of excellence, in a life affording them scope" (Wills, 2009, p. 55). Eudaimonia is the preferred approach to study and

understand well-being; this perspective offers an opportunity to realize one's potential and to recognize a sense of humanity through enacting relationships (Helliwell, 2002; Ring et al., 2006; Wills, 2009).

There are both affective, as well as, cognitive components to the experience of well-being. Affect is most commonly understood as "feelings" and cognition as "thinking." How one feels about life informs how one thinks of life and vice versa (Diener et al., 1985; 2002; Watson et al., 1988). Life satisfaction is strongly correlated to how a person thinks he or she has lived up to local cultural standards of 'good living'. Conversely, happiness is strongly correlated with how one feels about life in the present (Busseri et al., 2007; Diener, 1985; 1999; 2002; Folgheraiter & Pasini, 2009; Goldstein, 2007; Moller et al., 2007; Suldo et al., 2009; Watson et al., 1988; Wills, 2009). Current health conditions, political environs, familial relations, and social involvement greatly affect these scores (Busseri et al., 2007; Folgheraiter & Pasini, 2009; Goldstein, 2007; Moller et al., 2007; Suldo et al., 2009; Wills, 2009).

1.2 Introducing Social Capital: The Cost and Benefit of Our Relationships

Today, the working definition of social capital that is emerging from increasingly interdisciplinary literature refers to the "networks, norms, and understandings that facilitate cooperative activities within and among groups of individuals" (Helliwell, 2001, p. 43). Healy et al. (2007) state that these relationships are "based on trust and reciprocity that enable people to collectively resolve common problems and achieve common goals" (p. 6). Many researchers agree that since social capital refers to the existence and strength of interpersonal ties, its value to individuals within networks and outside of them depends

upon the uses to which the 'capital' is put. The distinctions of use among the interpersonal ties are called "bridging capital" or "bonding capital." Bonding capital refers to "ties within the group" (Helliwell, 2001, p. 43), and to the "social connections that build on commonality and homogeneity" (Healy et al., 2007, p. 6). Bridging capital refers to "having a wider and more inclusive radius" (Helliwell, 2001, p. 43), including "networks across diverse social cleavages . . . . neighborhood networks where people form relationships across identity differences" (ABS, 2002, p. 15). Many researchers argue that bonding capital provides the kinds of emotional and mutual support needed to "get by" while bridging capital can provide access to resources that are needed to "get ahead" (Healy et al., 2007, p. 7).

1.3 Relationships between Social Capital and Well-Being

Social capital must be considered if one is to study well-being, as all of the factors considered as constituting well-being are implicitly relational (i.e., education, health care, ability and opportunity for income, interpersonal relationships). Evidence shows that the structure and quality of social relations are in many ways fundamental to the self-assessment of well-being (Helliwell, 2001, 2002; Ring et al., 2006; Wills, 2009). Social capital may provide insights by recognizing the value of ordinary daily interactions in strengthening communal relationships (Healy et al., 2007, p. 7). Social capital has demonstrated strong correlations in areas similar to, or identical with, indicators for well-being: sound health, higher education, social inclusion, sense of safety, support, and social interaction (Busseri et al., 2007; Folgheraiter & Pasini, 2009; Goldstein, 2007;

Healy et al., 2007; Helliwell, 2001; Moller et al., 2007; Pungo, 2005; Sarracino, 2009; Suldo et al., 2009; Wills, 2009).

In order to understand the emergence of social capital in a relationship, one must locate from whence it arises. Cullen and Whiteford (2001) suggest that social capital is a "by-product of social relationships, and not as a result of conscious investment on the part of members within a social structure" (p. 34). In other words, through interaction a synergistic, systemic quality of relationship emerges. The 'by-product' of these relationships could not exist without two particular relationships interacting at that particular time in that particular contextual meaning-making space. Thus, social capital describes various kinds of nonsummative relationships with their ever-changing 'costs and benefits' among and between communities; indeed, the interpretations of meaning created in the interaction between communities and the interaction of relationships existing inside each of these communities all coalescing to create a unique quality of relationship.

Establishing a causal link between social capital and well-being is difficult, as research shows that the causal effect runs in both directions (ABS, 2002, p. 9), creating a reciprocal relationship reflecting social capital's own inherent qualities (a strange loop; feedback mechanism). However, the evidence is overwhelming that quality relationships are central to human wellness. As a brief example, spirituality (or "transcending oneself") is a key component to well-being (Wills, 2009). Yet, it is difficult to separate spiritual acts and social relations (social capital), as many person's opportunities and experiences in "transcending themselves" involve relationships with others, i.e., a person goes to a

church, serves a community by teaching classes, and performs other volunteer work to express spiritual values.

In countries like Columbia, where the general population is highly religious/spiritual and is a collectivist society (where social capital is high), the task of separating social capital and spirituality becomes nearly impossible (Wills, 2009). However, in more fragmented and socially isolating countries like America (Putnam, 1995), the general population is high in generalized religiosity but consistently demonstrates low levels of social capital and well-being when compared with other industrialized countries that are more secular with high levels of social capital (Healy et al., 2007; Helliwell, 2001; Pungo, 2005).

Jacob et al. (2008) reported that regularly engaging in ecologically sustainable behaviors (social) showed higher variance with well-being than regular practices of Buddhist meditation in America where the practice was performed alone at home (isolated). Goldstein (2007) demonstrated that reflecting on one's daily activities (interactions) for five minutes a day, every day for three weeks encouraged equal levels of well-being with the same sample focusing on a sacred object or moment for the amount of time. Although a sense of transcendence is an important factor for well-being, Goldstein (2007) and Jacob et al.'s (2008) studies suggest that it is through relational behaviors that well-being is obtained.

In recent years, American social capital has declined dramatically, while levels of addiction, depression, suicide, burn-out, depression, loneliness, and isolation have increased (Pungo, 2005; Putnam, 1995). Incidentally, England has demonstrated a similar

trend in recent years, while at the same time, other European countries are demonstrating higher levels of social capital and well-being (Helliwell, 2002; Sarracino, 2009). Putnam (1995) demonstrates a significantly strong correlation between increased technology, increased isolation, and decreased social capital. Isolation happens in small actions aggregating over time; if one is watching television, then one is not having dinner with his or her neighbors. If one is e-mailing co-workers, then people are not meeting in the mail room over coffee (Healy et al., 2007; Helliwell, 2001, 2002). Overall, communal relationships are foundational to well-being. Social capital's emphasis on healthy relationships engenders the very impetus humans depend upon for their well-being.

1.4 Community: Our Sociality, Our Selves

Inevitable group memberships constitute the need to define what community is and how it is created. Hence, looking at how individuals experience community will reveal much about how well-being is experienced, since these groups are the sociality in which lived experiences and social contexts emerge.

Community includes geographical and political boundaries, which affect levels of technology, quality health care, education, and other forms of social capital (Healy et al., 2007; Helliwell, 2001). However, community extends beyond said boundaries. Assumptions about how individuals understand and function within communities are being deeply questioned with the technological revolution well underway. The availability of international satellite and digital communication, accessibility of global transportation, and increased opportunities for information access - communities are being affected like never before.

Adelman and Frey (1997) define community as "place attachment, the emotional bonding of people and groups to places and things . . . via their relational connections with others who share that space" (p. 4). They continue to acknowledge how community "is constituted (created) and reconstituted (sustained) in communicative practices" (p. 4). Adelman and Frey further define community as "a particular type of conversation, grounded in dialogue" (p. 106).

This communication perspective, a constructionist perspective, offers insight into other implications and findings about community: (a) community is a relational phenomena that encourages overlapping views of self and others, (b) communities use overlapping symbol systems that reinforce overlapping meaning-making, and (c) the over-lapping views of self and other combined with overlapping symbol systems creates additional opportunity for members of the community to increase their sense of cohesion and belonging within the community (Adelman & Frey, 1997).

Bellah, Madsen, Sulivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985, 1991) claim that contemporary social life has been reduced to 'lifestyle enclaves' with minimal social interdependence. Adelman and Frey (1997) expand Bellah et al.'s (1985, 1991) claim suggesting that "new configurations based not on blood ties, but on common concerns and issues are emerging. They take on the form of support groups, residential settings, speech communities, and even a small but respectable, political movement known as communitarianism" (p. 2).

One example of community includes Adelman and Frey's (1997) "communitarianism" or intentional communities. People of every kind have attempted to

create communities in hopes of achieving higher levels of well-being for over two centuries throughout North America and Europe (Federation of Intentional Communities [FIC], 2000; Hicks, 2001; Pitzer, 1997). Early nineteenth century culture called these communities "utopias" (Hicks, 2001). Contemporary Euro-American culture calls them, "intentional communities"(ICs) (FIC, 2000). The FIC (2000) defines "intentional community" as:

> A group of people who have chosen to live or work together in pursuit of a common ideal or vision. Most, though not all, share land or housing. Intentional communities come in all shapes and sizes, and display an amazing diversity in their common values, which may be social, economic, spiritual, political, and/or ecological . . . . Some are secular, some are spiritually based, others are both. For all their variety . . . the communities featured hold a common commitment to living cooperatively, to solving problems nonviolently, and to sharing their experience with others. (p. 16)

Using this working definition, intentional communities offer a unique opportunity to survey a committed group of individuals working to build high levels of social cohesion through participation, potential equity, and the conscious creation of specific norms.

The very nature of creating a community to live out an ideal asks IC members to consciously be active in engaging in building and practicing social capital (social relations). The conscious efforts of many IC members to live cooperatively, actively practice conflict management, to work towards a common ideal, and to employ a

consensus model of governance (FIC, 2000) parallel to the current research efforts to build greater social capital in general communities for greater well-being.

A potential negative to the specific relational patterns in these intentional communities where bonding capital can be high, is the potential for social exclusion due to the high rates of homogeneity. This social inclusion can make IC's appealing for some people because the members are surrounded with people of similar ideologies. The drawback of excessive bonding capital leads to exclusion of nonmembers, increasing isolation, and limiting community members' ability to access necessary resources (Helliwell, 2001). The United States historically has created communities high in homogeneity with social consequences including:

> being suspicious of outsiders, socially and economically stratified, emotionally stifling, and limited in opportunities for personal and professional development. So long as members belonged to the right ethnic, religious, or racial groups – or stayed in their right place if they did not – and behaved within narrowly defined set of parameters, they could count on strong communal support. (Adelman & Frey, 1997, p. 2)

However, if a community is balanced in its bonding capital and bridging capital, extending its relations to non-members as well as members, these communities have the potential for high, stable rates of social capital and increased levels of well-being.

1.5 Summary: Bringing It Together

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experience of the co-researchers' well-being through the context of community. Well-being studies thus far

have focused on large case studies of countries or nations (Helliwell, 2001, 2002; Wills, 2009), quantitative studies on "static values" such as personality traits, gross national product correlations with happiness and/or well-being, or constructs (economic and psychological) of rural versus urbanized areas (ABS, 2002; Diener et al., 2002; Kim & Kim, 2009).

Based on previous research, there are indicators that communities, and the individuals who constitute those communities, may have a better chance at achieving higher rates of well-being when conscious efforts to work cooperatively, share resources, practice peaceful conflict resolution, and work toward a common ideal (building social capital) become interpersonal practices and norms. Due to the evidenced benefits of building social capital for creating more equitable and enjoyable communities, this study will add to a growing body of knowledge of how individuals experience well-being, thereby helping to inform social policy and empower individuals to live relationally well.

1.6 Research Question

1. What are the co-researchers' lived experiences of well-being or wellness in the context of community?

Chapter 2: Methodology

This research will explore the phenomenological experience of well-being through the context of community. Individuals create a sense of self through the construction and influence of sociality (e.g., active, past, and projected communities) interacting in a dialectical/dialogical manner (Baxter, 2004, 2011; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The navigation of this interaction is experienced through dialogic identity as an emergent self (Richey & Brown, 2007).

2.1 Theoretical Viewpoints

The Literature Review discussed general concepts that explored common conceptions of well-being and how the meaning and understanding of well-being is socially constructed through interaction, how social capital describes the quality of the social benefits or costs of these interactions (relationships), and lastly, a description of how individuals navigate these social worlds through multiple identities in play (dialogic identities).

This section will discuss specific theoretical stances and models that further refine these perspectives. First, a discussion of the philosophical stance of social constructionism and how it relates to the phroenetic understanding of well-being. Following is a discussion of the evident individual-social dialectic explaining how social construction arises within interaction. There is then a brief discussion of the differences between dialogic, dialectic, and discursive perspectives. At this point there is a discussion that articulates bona fide group theory, offering a lens to understand how

relationships form our communities and the mutual influence between group membership and single persons. And lastly, there is a discussion of the emergent self model (Richey & Brown, 2007) which describes a self that lives dialogic identities.

2.1.1 Epistemology. This research project uses the epistemology of constructionism (Crotty, 1998), with a philosophical stance of social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Gergen & Davis, 1985). Constructionism is an epistemology that declares meaning "to be constructed, not discovered" (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). Social construction holds that "all meaningful reality is socially constructed." (p. 55) Crotty continues:

> An object may exist as a phenomenal object regardless of whether
> any conscious beings construe it as a specific object (i.e., a table),
> it exists as a table only if conscious beings construe it as a table.
> As a table, it too, is 'constructed, sustained, and reproduced
> through social life. (pp. 54-55)

Crotty (1998) explains social constructionism as a perspective whereby, "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 42). Furthermore, Crotty states "meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage in the world they are interpreting" (p. 43).

Lorber and Moore (2002) are medical sociologists who successfully use a social construction approach to address issues of defining wellness, well-being, illness,

normalcy, etc. Their work has offered much insight into how the lived experience of disease, disability, and even regularly occurring physical phenomenon (i.e., menstruation) are constructed (perceived and interpreted) within a social context. Each individual's social context is unique consisting of constellations of age, disability, demographics, religion, education, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, religion, and gender. The social construction of illness or wellness does not suggest that disease or disability, pain, or sickness do not exist *out there*. However, how individuals understand these phenomena, how they respond to them, how they imbue them with meaning, is a social construction (Lorber & Moore, 2002).

As an approach, social constructionism is neither objectivist (meaning existing in an object itself) nor subjectivist (meaning existing only within an individual mind), but rather is a social realism (meaning being a human phenomena, arising from interactions with objects existing in the world) (Blumer, 1969; Crotty, 1998; Mead, 1934). Thus, social constructionism does not deny the existence of sick or healthy bodies, viruses, bacteria, or other existential phenomena; rather it fully embraces the interaction between object and human. This perspective understands that this interaction between observer and observed is acted upon and understood through a social context (e.g., group membership or communities) (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934).

Social construction maintains that all human phenomena, well-being included, is experienced through and emerges from interaction (Beck, 2001; Crotty, 1998; Stewart, Zediker, & Witteborn, 2006). This interaction and the concurrent and subsequent interpretations and activities are temporally bound, not pre-scripted or a priori (Arundale,

1999; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Beck, 2001). Thus social actors "engage in the continual process of defining their social realities" (Beck, 2001, p. 25).

Through each of these interactions, each person co-constructs social roles and social rules. This is not to say that individuals do not bring unique understandings or meanings to the co-construction table. They do. In fact, in order to engage meaningfully in society persons insist that others enact practices that display their assumed understandings of social competence and cohesion to coordinate appropriate responses with others (Beck, 2001; Blumer, 1969). This weaving of interactions, interpretations, and performance is an enactment of co-defining concepts such as 'normal' and 'relevant', as well as, 'happy' and 'healthy'.

For example, Yurkovich and Lattergrass (2008) interviewed 44 Native American Indians (NAIs) experiencing a persistent mental illness (PMI) to understand how they define/describe being healthy and being unhealthy. Composite key themes of health emerged from the capta:

> Being in balance or a sense of harmony, having equilibrium, and not being out of control of [one's] being, which includes the spiritual, cognitive, emotional, and physical domains, defines health. Health does not mean being without illness; rather, it means being empowered through knowledge of illness, and/or honest self-awareness. (p. 448)

For these 44 Native American Indians equilibrium/harmony involves "maintaining a sense of control over their well-being and symptoms while having hope" (p. 449). Yurkovich and Lattergrass acknowledged socio-economic, political, and spiritual

influences and subsequent worldview differences among various NAI tribe members. They conclude that, "as in all cultures, there is no uniform formula for the delivery of health care to individuals" (p. 457).

Garcia and Saewyc (2007) found that immigrant Mexican adolescents described being healthy as "centered on happiness, being positive, and looking forward" (p. 44), they also included, "exercise . . . . communication with family and friends, support, and helping others" (p. 47). While, these researchers were pleased that these Latino youths were engaging in "health promotion activities," they were "concern[ed] that despite interview probing, no participant talked about accessing formal health care providers to address identified mental health problems" (p. 49). The Latino youths expressed no concern about access or use of formal heath care (yet each of the youths were aware of services available and were able to accurately identify depression, signs of potential suicide, drug use, etc), yet the researchers were concerned both for the safety of the Latino families and the lack of adherence to American medical protocol. American medical norms expect members to attend a professional when experiencing distress, whereas Latino relational influences encourage individuals to turn to family members in times of crises, rather than to impersonal relations, except for when experiencing extreme or severe circumstances. These two Western (one Canadian and one American) doctoral nurses believed that if these youths would "acknowledg[e] mental health problems and readily identif[y] or acces[s] professional interventions [they] could promote healthy mental status[es]" (p. 49).

These examples offer a small sampling of how individuals interpret meanings for "healthy" according to past, present, and anticipated relationships (interactions). To look more fully at how the social construction of well-being affects individuals and relationships (past and present), it behooves researchers to look at how this interaction occurs. This interaction occurs within what has become to be known as an individual-social dialectic (McNall, 1979).

2.2 The Individual-Social Dialectic: Where Understanding Emerges

Just as an individual cannot wholly predict nor control an interaction within a dyad (Arundale, 1999; Stewart et al, 2006), so too, a dyadic interaction cannot wholly predict nor control communal creation, perpetuation, or transformation of a meaning (Adams, 2001). The individual, the dyad, and the community work together in nonlinear ways creating new meanings, maintaining old meanings, or changing extant meanings through interactions. Here the individual/social dialectic emerges to influence the relational dialectic between dyads and communal contexts while simultaneously, the community influences the dyad and the individual. A relational dialectic appears between a particular dyadic relationship and that dyad's experience of interaction with the community in which the dyadic relationship exists (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

How does individuality emerge? It is known that individuals, and their unique expressions, do not arise from a vacuum devoid of other humans. In order to be 'human' humans must live and interact with other humans. However, how each person comes to know what being 'human' means is determined through interactions with the world around us and the interpretations of those interactions (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934).

Richey and Brown (2007) use the term "emergent self" to describe the multiple spheres of influence coalescing to constitute a "self"; namely, the relational, co-cultural, and experiential.

How does sociality emerge? At its foundation, sociality would need to arise from two or more individuals "linked in some relational state." (Arundale, 2010, p. 2) There can be no "social" without individuals to begin creating the synergy of two or more individualities (threads) interacting to create the fabric of sociality (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1932, 1982). From cultures to concerts, institutions to restitutions, languages to libraries, humans would not (and do not) understand these experiences without developing and interacting with other humans. This interaction is not only with present persons but also with ideas, expectations, values, and patterns of behavior with present interactions, past interpretations of those interactions, and with anticipation of future interactions with present persons and imagined (projected) others (Mead, 1932, 1982). This phenomenon, the interplay between social and individual *to create* both the social and the individual, is the individual-social dialectic (Arundale, 2010; McNall, 1979).

A dialectical perspective allows for both the interplay of the individual and the social, and their co-existence as dynamic processes. Arundale (2010) elaborates on the distinctions of individual and social functions in his article *Relating:*

> In human activity, social functioning is distinct from individual functioning in that social activities cannot be accomplished solely through the agency of one individual, but neither can they be accomplished in the absence of individuals. Individual functioning is distinct from social functioning in that individuals carry

> on many activities in isolation from others, but their existence as individual agents capable of performing human activities has its basis in human sociality. (p. 3)

In other words, the "processes of connecting two individuals create the social in relationships, and dialectically, the processes of separating within relationships create the individuals who comprise them" (Arundale, 2010, p. 3).

2.2.1 Implications of the Individual-Social Dialectic. If relationships are co-constituted through the dynamic interplay of dialogue (verbal and nonverbal) then the constraints and affordances, as well as, the resources and practices enacted by each participant reflects, informs, and affects past, present, and future interactions among the relational parties (Arundale, 1999; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Stewart et al., 2006). Thus, there are several implications to keep in mind: (a) each relationship (and accompanying identity) is continuously being redefined thus, identities and perceptions of well-being are also in flux; (b) each interaction is synergistic, rendering it unrepeatable, thus indicating that well-being is a process rather than a product; and (c) social actors are both actors and acted upon within interaction (Baxter, 2011; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Stewart et al., 2006). Thus actors and their (non-)actions influence present interactions thereby taking an active role in creating the sociality that influences a person's well-being.

Each party within the relationship is dynamically defining and redefining who they are through the uptake and response of the other party to his or her actions and non-actions, which in turn, continuously redefines who each party is in relation to one another, themselves (Arundale, 1999; Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934), and to the

"generalized other" (Mead, 1934). These perceptions can be reinforced, perpetuated, ignored, or disseminated. In any case, they are co-created through the interactions of the relationship which are indeterminate and evolve in organic, nonsummative ways; perceptions of self are not created through traits or other static "things" within individuals in a relationship (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

No one party has control over a communication event (Stewart et al., 2006). As each person contributes to an interaction, the interaction becomes synergistic, non-summative. Each interaction is unique, due not to the particular positionality of each party involved, but to the particular interplay of all current positions and processes occurring at that time in those contexts. The outcome of this interplay is a nonsummative occurrence wherein neither party could have completely predicted the qualia or the outcome of the interaction.

Personal relationships are constituted in continued dialogue between parties (verbal and nonverbal), it is through the concrete actions of each party in which relationships are created (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Members are both social actors and objects of their actions – they respond/create response and then are subject to the consequences of their response (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934, 1982; Meltzer, 1964). These consequences are created through the interpretation and subsequent response of the other party, and the following interpretation and response of the initiating party. These interpretations become reified, affording and constraining the present and future interactions among the parties (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Krippendorf, 2009).

These interactions then inform, affect, and reflect the relationship's positionality, as well as, each party's position within not only that relationship but the remaining (and potential) constellations of relationships each are involved in, currently, and in the future. The relationships humans have define them; just as the individuals in the relationships define the relationship in a constant flux of interaction and meaning creation.

2.3 Dialogic, Dialectic, and Discursive: Distinguishing the Differences

In exploring dialogic identity within this study, it is important to address the differences between dialogical, dialectical and discursive perspectives. Namely, the difference lies in the defining focus of each one. Each of these perspectives acknowledge that meaning emerges through interaction. A merging of Buber (1958) and Cissna and Anderson's (1998, 2002) is described in Wasserman's (2004) description of the dialogism occurring in "conversations converging into moments when one acknowledges and engages another with a willingness to alter their own story" (p. 1). Baxter (2004) expands this perspective, placing dialogue centrally, with "dialogue as centripetal-centrifugal flux, dialogue as utterance, dialogue as aesthetic moment, dialogue as a critical sensibility" (p. 188). Essentially, dialogism is the act of creating meaning through dialogue.

There are many kinds of dialectical perspectives, just as there are dialogical ones. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) describe dialectical as encompassing the dialogic (through-dialogue), while focusing upon the "inherent contradictions" within the interactions (p. 30). These inherent oppositions appear to be a main defining point among differing dialectical stances.

A discursive perspective also sees meaning being created through dialogue, while focusing on issues regarding the creation, perpetuation, or change of power (i.e., hegemony, marginalization) (Ashcroft & Mumby, 2004). Discursive perspectives can embrace a dialectical perspective as well as a dialogical one.

2.4 Bona Fide Groups: A Theoretical Perspective for Looking at Contemporary Communities

A person can belong to many kinds of communities: (a) geographical, i.e., a town or municipality; neighborhood, i.e., a military base, a gated community, slums; (b) work, i.e., a convenience store, a university, a movie theatre, a local school; (c) hobby, i.e., bowling leagues, wood carvers association, sports team; (d) social, i.e., Girl Scouts, Free Masons, a local church, Sierra Club. Due to the many group memberships (communities) that one belongs to at any given time, it is worth exploring how group membership works.

The bona fide group perspective defines two interrelated characteristics: (a) "stable yet permeable group boundaries" and (b) "interdependence with their relevant contexts" (Frey, 2003, p. 4). Group boundaries, like other identity negotiations, are "stable yet permeable"; boundaries are defined and stable hence creating a social demarcation of who is a member, what members are expected to do, and how members are expected to behave. However, these same boundaries are continuously co-created, negotiated, and extinguished through interaction creating permeability, a fluidity of the social boundaries defining the group.

Putman and Stohl (1990) discuss four features that address the permeability of bona fide group: "(a) multiple group memberships [...], (b) representative roles, (c) fluctuations in group membership, and (d) group identity formation" (p. 150). Multiple group memberships imply multiple selves (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Richey & Brown, 2007) emerging from these overlapping influences which may reinforce existing relational interactions with others or these multiple memberships may be experienced as opposing or contradictory kinds of relational patterns within or among the different groups. For example, one may be a Girl Scout leader in one group and may wish to participate in a less demanding manner within the local Parent Teacher Association. A reminder that role conflict is not the same as multiple selves (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Richey & Brown, 2007) for a self is emerging within any given interaction, influenced by social norms but not solely by these constraints and affordances of social expectation.

The second feature, representative roles, are outgrowths of multiple group memberships and heuristics; interactions within a group often treat specific members as a representative to or for another group outside of the current group (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). For example, if one group member is Jewish, this member is likely to be seen as the residential spokesperson for all Jewish person perspectives outside of the group. If there is one female mechanic in a work group of male mechanics, she is likely to be treated as the female perspective in this group's interactions.

Membership changes occur at differing rates according to multiple socio-political factors; regardless, membership *does* change. As new members join and other members

leave, the group dynamic changes with each new individual influence. The fourth feature, group identity formation, acknowledges that persons vary in their levels of participation, power, commitment, interpretation and expression of norms, and an ability or desire for group cohesion (typical group processes); persons also vary considerably from interaction to interaction influencing group identity formation (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008).

Bona fide groups also exhibit an "interdependence of [the] group with its relevant contexts" (Frey, 2003, p. 5). This characteristic makes sense in the light of identity, sociality, and individuality being created and negotiated within dialectical/dialogical interaction. The group is created through collaborative, complex interactions within specific contexts. Then it operates within those contexts, as it also creates and changes those same contexts. Group memberships are the trees constituting the individual-social dialectic forest; group memberships are necessary components for the larger whole *and* they provide the texture of context for *persons* to emerge (and then influence the groups themselves).

To extend the ecology metaphor, living in a boreal forest, one cannot survive as a palm tree, but could thrive as a spruce sapling. A single spruce will (may) eventually influence deciduous trees around it (like birch or aspen), potentially blocking sunlight and using needed nutrients. Eventually, as other spruces grow, the deciduous trees no longer are able to compete with the shade tolerant spruce. Yet, it is this mix of spruce, birch, aspen, alder, etc. that create a boreal forest with its unique ecology. The "membership" of any particular part of a boreal forest is dependent upon many variables: sunlight exposure and intensity, type of soil, climate, moisture, wind patterns, permafrost,

as well as, mycorrhizal associations, animals for transport of seeds, disease, infestation (or protection from), fungi, lichens, etc. Each of these components are individual, yet it is their "group membership" interactions that constitute the boreal forest *and* it is within the context of that forest that these individuals are able to emerge.

2.5 The Emergent Self: The Self Living a Dialectical Existence

As a human, one is born into a world already abound in meaning. Meaning is constituted through interaction of the individual-social dialectic (Blumer,1969; McNall, 1979). Richey and Brown's (2007) model of the "emergent self" describes the:

> Overlapping or interconnectedness of the three systems of [a] model creat[ing] a space at the center for an ongoing emergence of the self in the moment, or in the now of th[e] lived moment, which can be considered as the human condition: being in a state of continuous becoming. (p. 148)

Within this interplay of the self and social, the self is autonomous in its perception and interpretation of external and internal phenomenon (the intrapersonal, or internal dialogue). The social is created through selves' interactions with others; the weaving of previous and ongoing interactions creates the knowledge/experience matrix (context) through which the self then interprets what it perceives. Thus, meanings are contextually bound; an action (situation, interaction) on the part of one party at a particular point in time and space does not constitute the same meaning of an action (situation, interaction) in another point in time and space. This model describes how the emergent self is a dynamic quality of being/becoming intersecting:

> The experiential or existential self (i.e., the self [one] take[s] into any interactive moment), the relational self (the aspects of the experiential self that reflect prior, in situ decision-making products of communicative action), and the cultural self (the aspects of one's experiential self that reflect broader, contextual decision-making and its products). (Richey & Brown, 2007, p. 147)

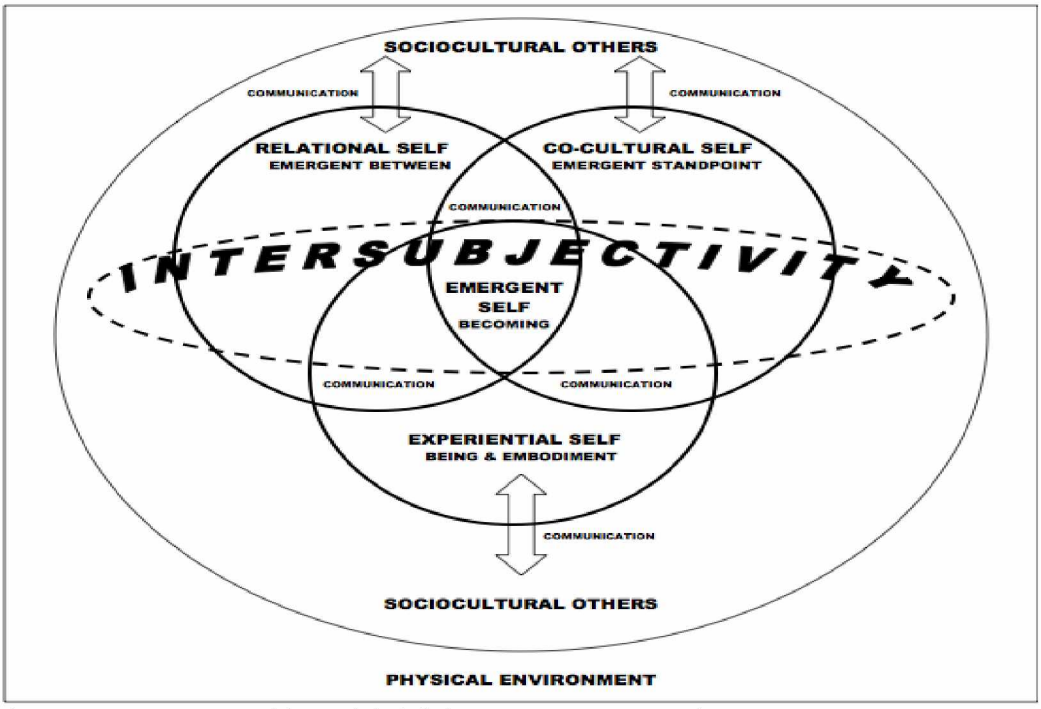

Figure 1 Emergent Self Model (Richey & Brown, 2007)

Interpersonal relationships are in fact products of *community* (Adams, 2001; Frey, 2003, Richey & Brown, 2007).

These constructionist theoretical paradigms inform my epistemology and ground my methodological viewpoint for exploring well-being.

2.6 Methodological Point of View

Qualitative research methods allow for rich, thick description of situated events and spaces. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe the nature of qualitative research:

> Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. (p. 8)

To demonstrate the importance of using social, relational, and cultural context in the understanding of well-being, Moller et al. (2007) addressed the issue of culturally biased well-being measures. They created the Anamnestic Comparative Self Assessment (ACSA) as a measure of well-being, due to an awareness that though Diener et al.'s (1985) Life Satisfaction Scale had proven to be robust in Western countries, it contained strong cultural bias offering mixed results in non-Western countries (p.2). Moller et al. (2007) point out that it is known that Westerners and Asians use such scales very differently, as well as, Latin Americans and North Americans (p.2). The ACSA "aims to reduce the problems of cultural bias and relativity to external measures" (p.1) by allowing *participants* to define the endpoints or 'anchors' of the measurement scale themselves through conversational *interviews*. The ASCA's frames of reference were then made explicit and personalized, as participants narrated concrete biographical end-points that discouraged superficial or socially desirable responses. Moller et al.'s (2007) mixed methods approach, made ACSA a success. This offers one example of how contextualizing the data, creating personal relevance and contexture, enriches the findings. For this study, conversational interviewing is the only method being used; it is

the most fitting method to co-construct knowledge of the lived experiences and understandings of the co-researcher's well-being.

2.6.1 A Methodological Trinity.

> *Understanding is not so much, then, about unearthing something of which we might previously have been ignorant, delving for deep principles or digging for rock-bottom, ultimate causes as it is about discovering the options people have as to how to live. (Thrift as cited in Bradbury & Gunter, 2006, p. 493)*

As logical positivism gained majority in scholarly pursuits in the early twentieth century, an effort to standardize research methods across disciplines ensued. Thus, it came to be that the physics standards of validity, reliability, and objectivity were laid down as a foundation for all scholarly exploration. Though criticism arose, it was overridden by the momentum of the current zeitgeist.

Almost a century later, criticism emerged strongly as social and human scientists once again approached the issues of quantitative research designs and methods being forced upon the complex, and often intangible variables of human and social science research. For the last two and half decades, strong cases countered this one-size-fits-all theoretical perspective.

Generally, qualitative research seeks to understand a phenomenon rather than to explain it; it seeks to describe rather than control or predict; it seeks to look at a systemic whole rather than a piece or unit. In order to produce quality research, standards are certainly encouraged and employed. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) use the term "craftsmanship" to indicate what others have specified as "integrity," "creativity,"

"trustworthiness," and "authenticity" (p. 241). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) encourage us to think of any craft as a mixture of expressive art and pragmatic expertise incorporating rigor, creativity, authenticity, and phronesis.

Janesick (2000) reminds researchers, that like any artist having one "correct" interpretation (validity) while simultaneously acknowledging the situated, personal, contextualized position of their co-researchers is "absurd" (p. 393). She encourages a look at the historical value of the case-study; the case-study's immense value has been due precisely because of its uniqueness, its ability to look at the individual within contextual connections, thereby rendering the idea of reliability as useless and counter-intuitive in a case-study (p. 394). Janesick (2000) asks researchers to look at their passion for understanding people and research. When the contextualized persons are taken out of their research, researchers have "lost their way" by "depersonalizing the most personal of social events" (p. 394).

2.6.2 Assumptions, Affordances, and Assessments of Using Constructionism. Using a constructionist epistemology to study well-being places specific parameters on how to conceptualize and conduct research in regards to well-being. Leonardi et al. (2005) suggest five propositions: First, as a social construct, well-being should not "be reified into a concrete thing" (p. 54). Hence, well-being is a process, there is no teleological end-state to be achieved for the change is indeterminate, ever-continuous. This reflects Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) defining parameters of continuous change within a dialectic.

Second, interpretation and assessment of one's well-being is a cognitive [and affective] construction, "evoked by the specific question in its particular context" (Leonardi et al., 2005). The individual is reflecting on how to answer the question, yet the knowledge production is social – the thought of the co-researcher is verbally expressed in a particular social, relational, and temporal nexus, then is refined through a conjointly co-constituted interaction with the researcher. Here the interplay of an emergent self, navigating a dialogical identity through interpreting its location (relational) within the individual-social dialectic context becomes most evident. The individual reports life experiences based on "a material consciousness, and use heuristic shortcuts because a large quantity of information, with which to make satisfaction judgments is available" (p.55). The large quantity of information includes but is not limited to interpretations informed by the social context (relational, cultural) in which one has lived (historical) and currently lives (emergent) and the individual's cognitive and affective processes of "memory search, interpretation, evaluation, and editing" (p.55).

Third, the well-being construction may not be "read as a pattern of casual relationships but should refer to ways used by people to construct their satisfaction judgments" (Leonardi et al., 2005, p. 55). This reflects Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) observation that change within a dialectic "simply *is*, and the research task is to capture its fluctuating pattern through time" (p. 12).

Individuals' assessment and interpretation of well-being can be "generated from heuristics based on general and superordinate aspects despite specific information," (Leonardi et al., 2005, p. 55) *and* individuals may "derive satisfaction judgments from

more specific and subordinate aspects" (p. 55). This proposition emphasizes that each person arrives at a judgment of well-being through being both subject to and an "object" of enacted interactions; individuals live in the 'particular' of unique constellations consisting of life circumstance and social context, only by also co-constituting the social (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Blumer, 1969; Richey & Brown, 2007).

Fourthly, the correlation between two different satisfaction judgments (cognitive and affective) made at the same time, "reflect the use of the same heuristic, rather than a casual effect" (Leonardi et al., 2005, p.56). In other words, when asking co-researchers how satisfied they are with their life, cognitive autonomy does not offer the opportunity to completely know which heuristic (individual/internal processes, social/external contexts, and the blend of the domains within each) an individual is using to inform the interpretation. In addition, the emotive and cognitive aspects of recalling memories and the interpretation of those experiences intertwine so thoroughly that it is near impossible to tease them apart.

Lastly, Leonardi et al. (2005) remind researchers to not assume "that people always construct their satisfaction judgments in the same way, and therefore we want to consider this potential source of variability" (p. 56). Explaining this fifth and final proposition of using a constructionist perspective, Leonardi et al. (2005) consider how changes in viewing life satisfaction can be influenced by both "changes in ways of constructing satisfaction judgments (heuristics)" and in "the changes of some content variables on which the heuristics are based" (p.56).

Using the emergent self model (Richey & Brown, 2007) within the constructionist perspective, individuals who consider how community and communicative acts have affected their understanding of well-being will be doing so from a unique self conjointly co-constructed in the moment. This self is one that is emergent in its particular discussion located in the intersection of researcher, co-researcher, and culture within a specific constellation of space, time, relational contexture, as well as, past and present understandings and interpretations of self, other, well-being, and community.

2.7 Research Design

Research design addresses how a study is formatted. Below are subsections introducing the reasoning and procedures for using life world interviews, how co-researchers were chosen for this study, the interview space of the interviews, how the data will be represented, and how the analysis will be presented. This section also reflects the structure of the relationship between researcher and co-researcher detailing roles and responsibilities.

2.7.1 Conversational Interviewing. Specifically, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe conversational interviewing as "allowing for the unfolding of a perspective of one's life world (*lebenswelt*)" (p. 153). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) explain how narratives are "one of the natural cognitive and linguistic forms through which individuals attempt to organize and express meaning and knowledge" (p. 153). In addition, they offer seven features of interview knowledge: (a) produced, (b) relational, (c) conversational, (d) contextual, (e) linguistic, (f) narrative, and (g) pragmatic (p. 53).

All seven aspects of knowledge construction have been considered in analytical procedures.

Conversational interviewing as a valid research method includes a general knowledge of qualitative research methods and of a postmodern perspective on knowledge production. Conversational interviewing is an optimal research tool for this study. This kind of interviewing invites rich descriptions of lived experience, provides an innate flexibility of use, and allows for "taking into account the contextuality and heterogeneity of social knowledge" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 171).

Life-world interviews are one specific method for data collection among many within the field of qualitative research. These interviews focus on a person's understanding of his or her unique lived experience (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p.153). As expressed earlier, narratives are "one of the natural cognitive and linguistic forms through which individuals attempt to organize and express meaning and knowledge" (p. 153). Discursive interviewing which focuses on "how knowledge and truth are created within discourse" (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 155) with analysis often on "how truth effects are created within discourses that are neither true nor false" (p. 226). These interviews capture the strength of describing life accounts in a conversational style as an avenue for meaning-making.

2.7.2 Interacting with The Co-Researchers. In recruiting co-researchers to participate in an interview concerning their lived experience of well-being as understood through their active communities, I included minimal criterion for co-researcher selection: (a) participants must be between the ages of 25 and 65; (b) live in a small,

semi-rural Alaskan location that offers easy access for both interviewer and interviewee to meet in-person; (c) co-researchers must be willing to be audio or video-recorded; (d) co-researchers must be willing to discuss their experience and understanding of well-being and how (if) they think/feel community influences personal well-being. These criterions were assessed through an initial screening conversation.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) established seven stages to a qualitative interview. The basic design for the interviews in this study followed the subsequent design components: (a) thematizing: an exploration of the lived experience of adults aware of participating in community and experiencing some level (high, low, or otherwise) of well-being; (b) designing: planning life-world interviews with 15+/-10 adults between the ages of 25 and 65; (c) interviewing: a semi-structured interview guide was used for the individual interviews. Anticipated length of interview: 45 minutes to 2.0 hours; (d) transcribing: all interviews are transcribed; (e) analyzing: emergent themes from all of the interviews were analyzed in respect to common themes, and how co-researchers perceived communities as contributing to personal well-being; (f) verifying: when feasible, co-researchers confirmed the written narratives underscoring the consensus of themes in the individual interviews and their interpreted meanings – lending integrity to the interpretation of each lived experience; (g) reporting: the results are reported in a thesis and potentially future conference papers.

In order to ethically conduct this research, I employed four procedures typically employed for human research subjects: (a) informed consent forms, (b) confidentiality through pseudo-names and other "pseudo-" replacements to disguise identifying details

of an individual co-researcher, (c) an explanation of consequences for participating in the interview, and (d) an explanation of my role as a researcher. The Informed Consent form (Appendix A) spelled out the structure, purpose, rights, and responsibilities of the researcher and the co-researcher. The forms were reviewed prior to any interviewing, with extra care given to assist co-researchers in understanding the information contained within the Informed Consent form.

Confidentiality includes not sharing the identity of the co-researcher with anyone outside of the parameters set forth in the Informed Consent form; disguising names, locations, and other possibly identifying information that may be disclosed through the interview process. Confidentiality also addresses sensitive details that the co-researcher may not want published and having their request honored. I performed these processes to the best of my ability.

Potential consequences of participating in the interview are included in the Informed Consent form. This includes informing co-researchers of possible psychological, mental, emotional, or even spiritual or physical consequences to the outcome of participating in the interview process. For an interview regarding well-being co-researchers may expect to experience any, all, or none of the following: increased awareness of the effect of roles, community, norms, relationships, or wellness in their lives; potential (dis)comfort at a deep exploration of who one sees themselves to be in relation to their communities; potential (dis)comfort at increasing production of knowledge in the field of identity or well-being research.

The role of the researcher is "magnified because the interviewer him-or herself is the one obtaining knowledge" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.74). I informed my co-researchers that in this role, I am a researcher rather than a minister, therapist, or friend (I am a registered Interfaith Minister and have training in Human Services). Delineating our roles assisted in clarifying boundaries, and the purpose of our roles and the discussion for the duration of the interview. Offering a commitment to my role as researcher, being conscious of the purpose of our time together, and informing the co-researcher of my personal epistemological stance (in appropriate language to address my co-researcher) facilitated my enactment of ethical research and the co-researchers confidence in our interaction.

These four implementations (informed consent, confidentiality, consequences, and role of researcher) offered ample opportunity for any questions from the co-researchers concerning their participation in the research to surface and be addressed prior to the interview process. Informing the co-researcher that I am available at any time throughout the research process to discuss concerns or questions regarding the research, and that they have the right to withdrawal at any time offered a demonstration of ethical research responsibility (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.76).

2.7.3 Interview Space. The interview conducted was a semi-structured phenomenological life world interview, thematized around how the co-researcher as an adult living in a small, semi-rural town in Alaska experiences well-being through dialogic identities enacted in (possibly) many communities. Interviews took place when a consensus had been made between interviewer and interviewee, abiding by constructed

parameters (meeting criteria for confidentiality, etc). All of the interviews took place in the interviewee or interviewer's home.

The purpose of this interview is an exploration of how well-being is experienced through relationships, i.e., community. Thus the form of the interview incorporated aspects of a conceptual interview and narrative interview without necessarily strictly adhering to either one. The style of questions employed were mainly probing or supportive secondary questions to seek elaboration or clarification. There were an intermittent dispersal of leading questions to stimulate conversation or bring the interview back into focus when needed. Conscious consideration was taken in constructing leading questions to fulfill the purpose of checking reliability of interviewee answers (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp.170-5). Data collected for this research was collected through note-taking and recording of the interviews. Data has been kept in a secure location within the Department of Communication. Recordings (notes, audio or video recordings) were destroyed as quickly as possible once transcription was completed.

2.7.4 Representation. Given my predilection for megastructural thinking, pattern-seeking tendencies, understanding of life as artful, and natural eclecticism, my data representation will be eclectic. In a personal and professional desire for the integrity of conveying the richness and texture of meaning inherent in lived experience my choice for descriptive, meaningful representation will most likely take on a bricolage form. This may include pieces of narrative, interview quotes, metaphor, and visualizations. Many of these methods of representation occur naturally in my style of everyday presentation.

2.7.5 Reflexivity: The Researcher as a Tool. Human science methodology recognizes that the researcher is as much a unique constellation of selves and experiences, as is the other persons being studied. Hence, reflexivity in research is encouraged because this acknowledgement admits the researcher's unique lens through which he or she perceives and interprets the world (Creswell, 2007). A researcher's perspective inherently influences the method, execution, analysis, and presentation of the study; human science recognizes that value-free science does not exist (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Recognizing reflexivity promotes researchers to practice an accounting for their actions and perspectives in phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007).

2.7.6 Analysis. Acknowledging my strengths, weaknesses and preferences as a person and as a researcher, my analysis will be eclectic much the same way as my representation of the data. The focus will take the form of phenomenological theme analysis. Bricolage is a well-fitted descriptive term for my method of analysis as it was for my representation of the data. Bricolage is an eclectic, pragmatic method of analysis where the researcher uses whatever resources and tools are available to make meaning (Janesick, 2000). I understand these forms of analysis and perspective to best describe the inherent nature of the complex interplay of selves, relationships, and context creating additionally complex interconnections between identity, roles, reifications, and the continuous, collaborative process of meaning-making.

2.8 Researcher's Expectations of the Research

Due to the limited number of constructionist studies regarding well-being, I anticipate that the research will find a deeper understanding of single person's lived

experience and understanding of well-being. These findings will be of a particular nature focusing on understanding the lived experience of well-being within unique social contexts. It is anticipated that the theoretical constructs and approaches employed in this study will allow *and validate* the rich descriptions of lived contradictions, created and experienced ambiguous meanings, and sense of self within the multifaceted experience of well-being within distinct social contexts.

Qualitative conversational interviewing steps further into the domain of understanding individuals' lived experience. Interviewing is able to begin identifying emergent themes among co-researcher's co-created narratives, offering deeper insight into individual experience of well-being within their personalized community contexts.

Studying well-being *in context* allows researchers, policy-makers, educators, and other helping professionals to be able to empower individuals, institutions, and additional influential groups in addressing the menagerie of social maladies by looking at how well-being is constructed and experienced.

Chapter 3: Life World Interviews

3.1 Austin's Lebenswelt

Austin is a Caucasian female in her early 50's living in a small, semi-rural town in Interior Alaska. Austin and I met in my house for the interview. Its location gave us the most privacy in negotiating our families schedules. We are on a familiar basis with one another, and we enjoy some catching up while the tea heats up before we begin the interview. Once the tea is ready, I go over the Informed Consent form with Austin. We naturally move into the beginning of the interview when I introduce the interview questions. I ask Austin to begin with describing for me her understanding of what wellness or well-being is. She begins:

> I think it would have to encompass spiritual, physical, social, emotional . . . stability . . . security. I think of it as . . . the word implies to me, in fact, a deep joy of living. And of relationships with each other; our relationship with our self, our relationship with God. That doesn't always mean we know what we're doing, or [have] all of the answers, but we feel confident that we either get to know the answers or have access to finding out the answers. So, as an individual, or even as a community, if we feel like we need help with something, we don't feel powerless. So, I think empowerment has to be part of it as well.

For clarification, I ask Austin to describe what she means by stability or security in this context. She states that it means, "knowing (hopefully knowing), having a sense of consistency that our basic needs would be met on all these different levels - our spiritual

needs, our emotional needs, our physical needs." When asked to describe the elements of well-being separately, Austin begins by describing the spiritual as "making a connection with the Creator." She puts this into a larger context:

> The whole focus of my belief is on unity. That God made us to be spiritual beings, to have our relationship with our Creator but that also has to be reflected in our relationship with each other . . . . we all have a soul, and that every soul yearns to make some connection with its Creator. And that being a very . . . basic need. I really feel that a lot of our social family ills are because people are trying to fill *that need* [with] flat screen TVs and video games and fantasy football. Not that any of those things are bad in and of themselves but if we use them to fill that void, it's not going to work.

Austin explains that a key component to creating this sense of community is to "get inside each other's homes; to have gatherings of children where you're talking about virtues, [like] kindliness . . . . we're just trying to start the conversation of what does kindness look like? What does justice look like?" She tells me that congruent with conversations that reflect common human values, the purpose of gathering together is also to foster "that basic principle of good faith, trustworthiness, and purity of motive" through "coming together, praying together and having small groups of study."

In the continuing dialogue, I ask Austin if "what it means to be spiritual is that it's in our everyday actions?" She explains that:

> Life should be a prayer and to me that's kinda the idea. It's not that we're to be going around going OOoohhhmmm but that, that breath of the sacred should

> *infuse* . . . And in fact, when we are . . . when we get a taste of it, it provides the greatest joy that we can imagine!

Austin uses this statement as an opportunity to segue from the spiritual to the physical elements of well-being. The physical for Austin is not limited to "our physical health, nutrition, exercise" but extends also to the "ability to have access to" education, such as, "mathematics, science, literature - all of these things are really important for people to have." She emphasizes that "it's all related, because the physical . . . encompasses [the] spiritual, [the] emotional, and education."

Austin continues to emphasize various aspects of "the physical":

> I think that physical well-being has to encompass a cultural aspect which at this point we're not doing very well. I can see that we tend to see culture much more still in a Western view. Which basically means: I love to have a beaded necklace but by God you're going to be at work whether its moose hunting season or not! It's just not . . . we just don't yet get it . . . . but I think it is very important to even identify them as being issues. So that hopefully we can address those things. And to not see ourselves as others. We're one family with some different traditions, and its really - if I live here in Interior Alaska, wouldn't I want to learn about the traditions of the traditional, original inhabitants here?

Austin comes back to the high value she places on education. She explains how "education is not simply going to a local public school," but also includes spiritual development, local knowledge, practical skills, and community service. Austin explains how important local skills are, such as filleting fish, "knowing how sharp the knife needs

to be, what angle to put it in, all of these things are tremendously important. I think we really just discount that now."

Austin goes on to say that all of children should be able "to go outside and identify all of the plants and their medicinal uses and we don't have that. We need to be much more holistic." She believes that a lot more "has to be done on the local level." Austin tells me how education includes values, interaction, as well as knowledge. She says that education should be relevant to our life, to enrich a way of life, including the "idea that we share our knowledge."

From this point, we begin to discuss the community's responsibility to care for, "even the people who are the most challenged," and how "we need to find ways to address those issues that are more . . . more real." She provides an additional example of how her local community decided to deal with a house of "chronic inebriates" after several years of various negotiations and debate about what the community should do at addressing their living conditions:

> The City Council decided they were going to condemn it. That's the answer! [slams palm on table] You condemn it! [slams palm on table again] You knock it down! [long pause] And? Ok – you condemn it, you knock it down; you've just made five or six people homeless. What are you going to do about it? Well, that wasn't part of it – you know, "We just need to get rid of that *problem*!"

Austin continues much more softly saying she understands "that society has to take some stands against living conditions that are unhealthy – but that just seems to me that in a really thriving community those would not be the [kind of] decisions we would make."

Austin voices that these types of decisions are only "displacing the issue; creating yet other issues," instead of "dealing with the heart of the issue." Austin articulates her understanding of the heart of the issue saying that the entire issue of "chronic inebriates is a HUGE issue. Again I think it's a spiritual issue. I think the real long visionary view is to provide children with that internal strength so that they don't need that stuff!" I offer an insight from an article written by an indigenous person who is a recovering alcoholic, who said that alcohol became the alcoholic's microphone; that for many, alcohol is their permission to speak up for the first time. She acknowledges this state of affairs in many communities with concern. Austin provides a poignant example as we move into a discussion about sexual abuse, specifically in rural Alaska. She spoke with great concern of the extremely high frequency with which this abuse occurs, especially (though not exclusively) to girls in some of the Native villages in which she has contacts. Austin then tells me the story of a time when a close relative served on a local board working with a state agency to offer a workshop on healing. Austin continues telling me that it became apparent to this relative that she "may have been the only one in attendance who had *not* been sexually abused while growing up." She explains that when this relative shared this insight with some of the other workshop hosts:

> [The host] could not *imagine* that there was *any* woman who had not been abused by her brothers or father.. Because in her experience – that was the way it was . . . And I think that when you have that kind of lack of security, I think it does all sorts of horrible things to your mind and to your soul.

After a long pause, I ask Austin to describe how she feels communities affect personal well-being. She offers a succinct response; she begins with a metaphor of sewage. Austin tells me that "there are always exceptions; you will always have the rose that will grow out of the sewage patch - the person who overcomes and rises above." She changes her tone, saying, " but statistically speaking, if you were in a sewer, you're not going to last very long – or – you're going to take on the qualities of that sewer." Austin offers some suggestion as to what a sewage community may be like; a community "that is full of prejudice, violence, substance abuse, divorce, or promiscuous sex; the children arising from that community are going to be – appears to me statistically – full of fear, anger, confusion." She continues to offer me additional examples of possible physical problems in such a community: "malnutrition, obesity, hypertension, drug addiction, FAS issues – that doesn't sound to me like a community in which children can thrive and concentrate on developing their capacities to the best of their ability." Austin states that she thinks that it is our "job is not to throw obstacles in the way of our children. I'm saying children, but really all people." Austin pauses, then adds that there is a difference between sewage and good compost. She explains that good compost "is something that you have to be very methodical about, and it's an enrichment!"

Austin shares how a small office she worked for in her college days changed with a new supervisor, she tells me that she had "a wonderful supervisor, and then she left, and the *new* supervisor was a very controlling and judgmental. And this had been a very supportive, kind of small department in the library - so it was a shock to me!" Austin describes the experience as "*very, very* difficult. Because oftentimes that kind of

environment nurtures back-biting, resentment, and bad feelings." She states that it was a "real shock to me! Now, granted the woman was a Holocaust survivor! She had her tattoo – she must have been a child." Austin pauses for a moment, then admits that "unfortunately *those* kind of scars - when you're in those kind of situation the reaction for some people *must* be that some people really want to be in control at *all* times. So – you have to give her that."

She voices some of the pros and cons of "legalistic enforcements." Austin suggests that while society should take steps to protect vulnerable populations, the long view for creating healthy communities must be "more nurturing, has to be more community-based, and has to be more family-based - because then you're empowering and you're educating." This moves us into a discussion about marriage for a while. She describes her understanding of marriage as "a fortress – in the safety aspect; it's a sanctuary to be yourself. And even at home, in your marriage – there needs to be courtesy, and respect, and love." Austin thinks that when "people are choosing their life partners, it also goes back to education I think – is this someone that you want to be talking to for the rest of your life?" She states that home "is my sanctuary. I really feel so blessed as to have found a partner that is such a good balance for me." Austin emphasizes her realization of having the "balance of a supportive spouse – that I don't have to do this alone – either the child rearing or even just the whole life thing."

We take a short break, refilling our cups with more tea. I ask Austin to tell me about the best and the worst periods in her life. Austin recalls a personal experience with sexual abuse when she was a young girl as one of the more challenging events in her life.

She uses her own experience to emphasize the importance of educating children, for "when I was growing up, there was not the same kind of exposure" and emphasis on "teaching our children about when and who to talk to should someone touch them inappropriately." She describes her own experience as feeling "very afraid, and very lonely, and very vulnerable. And very – just feeling so powerless."

We pause. Austin tells me another example of a challenging experience, then she easily transitions to the best of times. Austin shares how the best times in her life are characterized as, "almost anytime I have been working in a group that has a common vision, almost whether we achieve it or not! As long as we're working on something that we see as of being of importance to the community." She offers an example of her involvement in co-leading a local class working with children that provides a storytime, , plays games, and focuses on "various virtues such as kindness, patience, fair-mindedness, honesty, justice, etc." Austin tells me that it is "very exciting." Austin tells me of another time when she lived in a different country, and the support she felt as she shared a common vision with other young mothers from around the world. She shares that just having a "group with such great diversity of people – who have very different philosophies of child-rearing" but because "we're all trying to according to the guidelines in our [sacred] writings – that is such a *powerful* bond." She states that instead of looking at "our differences, 'Oh gosh! They do it *that* way!' grumble, grumble; it was wanting to learn from each other. To appreciate and celebrate our diversity. And that was a real precious gift to have that." Austin tells me that having "that support was really, really profound for me."

Lastly, when I ask Austin if she had any last words she would like to add, she tells me that we must "keep it real"; that our actions must become a part of a way of life to be effective. She agrees that part of 'keeping it real' is understanding and coming to know the lived or life relevancy of our actions. Austin tells me that she thinks "motive is really important; that our life being a prayer – that that's not the same as the walking around and just saying the same verses over and over." She continues saying that life as a prayer is not "a ritualistic automaton kind of a thing. There has to be that heart." Austin declares that the idea of service to our community is not "just something we do so we can put it on our resume, or so that we can get them signed off for our – you know – DUI, or school credit, or whatever it is." She spends some time discussing neighborhood community-building. She tells me:

> What is really important is for the adults to reflect on their life -looking at their entertainments, their use of time, and what example are they setting in their lives. I thought it so perceptive and so profound. We cannot say do as I say, not as I do - you cannot expect that *that* is going to contribute to the transformation of society.

Being reminded of some of the important values in her faith, I ask Austin to explain what she means one of their practices, "consultation." She tells me that when people "people come together to consult, the idea is that you're being frank." She further suggests that to consult as a community, "you're looking for people who have the virtues of dedication and devotion and honesty and fair-mindedness. In [our] writings it says that 'the spark of truth comes forth after the clash of differing opinions.'" Austin strongly emphasizes that it is "the opinions that are supposed to be clashing – NOT the people!" She further

emphasizes that this does not mean that people are not "supposed to try not to bring up things that might not be considered controversial, but it's the manner in which we present them." Austin also states that when "you express your opinion, it's no longer your opinion, it belongs to the group. And the group can do whatever it wants with it." Austin offers an example of how divisive community decisions can be when people are not "wanting to listen to each other and [are expressing] anger that is not productive." She tells me about when the local community decided to abolish the local police department. She describes the proceeding events surrounding the issue as, "always having a hidden agenda that . . . that we [did not] feel that we can have open consultation. There was a lot of anger, and not a lot of honesty." She summarizes the situation in relation to consultation with stating that when "you don't have honesty and courtesy in your consultation, you're probably not going to achieve very much." Austin then begins discussing how she personally uses consultation.

She explains how consultation "can be between a parent and a child; but it still needs to uphold these principles of respect . . . the search for the truth, not the advancement of a personal agenda." Austin confesses that her most challenging times as an adult are intertwined with "being a parent and feeling confident in my actions and my decisions." She reflects that this is a part of her life "where it ebbs and flows." Austin describes how consultation with her husband and son help her to confront and overcome these challenges; she feels that "through consultation and prayer, reflection, and looking at what spiritual principles are involved" people can come up with possible solutions..

The conversation comes to a natural lull, so I ask Austin if there is anything else

she would like to add. Austin ends the interview with a summarization of the responsibility of communities and individuals to provide security and stability within their everyday actions; to consciously participate as a community and to be worthy participants:

> I think the idea that people are looking at wellness, and all the different aspects of wellness – that it's not just economic. I think sometimes we poo-poo economic wellness – but sustainable agriculture, livestock – that's all part of economic, which it doesn't always have to mean money being involved . . . . We may not be able to [provide physical resources], there may not be resources available, but that we can feel confident that through consultation, and through working together, we can at least address it in some way. There has to be a lot of good faith involved too . . . and trust . . . and the . . . what do you call it? The . . . being worthy of trust.

We close the interview, refill our cups of tea, and engage in some friendly discussion to give the night some closure. We thank each other for a good talk, and I see her to the door.

3.2 Avy's Lebenswelt

Avy is a Caucasian female in her late fifties living in a small, semi-rural town in Interior Alaska. We decide to conduct the interview at Avy's house. I am on familiar terms with Avy and we have several mutual acquaintances. Avy immediately puts on pot of tea. I fiddle with the multiple electronic devices I brought to conduct the interview,

while Avy makes herself comfortable in a sofa chair. Soon, I go over the Informed Consent form with Avy, then introduce the interview questions. We begin.

I ask Avy to describe her definition of wellness or well-being. She begins by stating that this "is when you are not sick; where you feel decently comfortable in whatever place or circumstances you are. I feel like you [are] have the skills and tools to deal with it." I tell her that other interviewees talked about a concept of balance, and then asked if she agreed with them. She responds by saying that balance is "part of not being sick," then pauses and comments on how large of a topic this subject is. We both laugh.

Avy begins to speak of how if we lived in an ideal world, "we wouldn't even consider the thought" of what it means to be well. She continues:

> So in order to describe wellness, it seems to be this ideal situation, that maybe a lot of people don't experience. It might be an ideal that we feel a need to strive for, that maybe people aren't supposed to be unhappy and riddled with defense mechanisms all the time.

We laugh again. I speak of my own defense mechanisms and how they had never contributed to my sense of happiness. Avy observes that the lucky people are "the ones whose handicaps are visible." She goes on to say that,

> I think the majority of us have learned ways to hide our shortcomings and not be forthcoming, not feel comfortable in our communities aaanndd as a result that even tends to get driven underground with ourselves. So we aren't aware that we are doing something to try to keep ourselves safe, our perceived safe.

I affirm her statement, and Avy tells me how this hiding limits the amount of "happiness or joy that you can experience in life. That would be another approach to wellness, is that it's your ability to experience joy – with yourself and with the group of people you're interacting with." We discuss this for a while. Then I ask her what "kinds of skills and tools are necessary for experiencing well-being?" Avy responds saying that some of it is "environmental, that people should not be in fear of what will happen next." She also voices her sense of the irony when she notes that people "to seem to develop the skills they need to experience joy much easier if that's the environment they've been sort of swimming in all their life."

Avy pauses, then begins to discuss the "tools of well-being." She extemporizes a cake metaphor. She talks about the frosting being, "delicious stuff . . . you don't even know what the cake flavor is, you just know that the frosting looks lloovveellyy and that's the reason why you want to live in upper scale neighborhoods perhaps." She continues talking about material goods such as golf courses or new cars as being part of this frosting. Avy suggests that if there was no cake, "the frosting would just be a big bunch of glop. So, really what produces wellness [is] the ability to produce joy in life - your cake." She speculates that having a cake that is able to withstand the external environmental factors, "all seem to horn back to interpersonal relationships – because they're all different; the relationships with your friends and your family."

Avy explains that our interpersonal relationships and, "our emotions and our intellect are part of this physical world. But what guides our emotions and our abilities to

pick up those skills is another layer . . . maybe it's the leavening what you don't see." She explains further:

> It manifests itself in little holes in your cake, that appear to have nothing in them – but – without that leavening your cake sort of . . . well, it's a cracker so to speak . . . and that is your spiritual capacities and skills which is basically your understanding of your relationship with your Creator.

Avy declares that this relationship is the ability to "tap into the purpose of your life. Since the Creator created everything, He also created us with this need to have a purpose for our life." She emphasizes that this need for purpose seems to be a part of being human; that each of us needs to have "a meaning of life, to have a meaningful life, and all that." Avy summarizes herself thus far, telling me that we have a spiritual ability to tap into the purpose of our life, then we have those "emotional, interpersonal skills," and that " we are physical beings living in a physical world – humans are just wired – seems part of our creation – to make fun things."

I then ask Avy that if we are to keep the cake metaphor, "would you give any particular component greater importance?" She decides that the spiritual aspect is of the greatest import because, "all of the spiritual teachings that have come from the great prophets - none of them have implied that this world is the only world." She continues saying that what "we're experiencing right now is only a small part of our spiritual life and that it goes on after death." Avy summarizes this topic by saying, that our physical existence in this world is limited to this world; "though they have great import, they are not as important as the spiritual." She evidences this with discussing how people can be

"terribly limited physically, they have physical handicaps and that sort of thing, and they still carry on – they can have fulfilling and joyful relationships with other people." Avy concludes that this relationship appears to be "something that transcends your physical body, mechanisms of being a human being." She ends this metaphor by suggesting "that's on a higher plane; that it's not totally limited by your physical - and your physical seems to be the most fragile."

Here we pause and I review my notes. I ask Avy if she wanted to say anything more about the paradox she the we seem to develop these tools for well-being through experiencing adversity. She retorts that it is "like a kid trying to walk . . . It sort of gives us incentive, doesn't it?" I laugh and agree. She continues in the perspective of the child learning how to walk, "I don't like where I am right now; I think I'd like to be somewhere else! And what do I need to learn or master in order to get somewhere else?"

Avy begins talking about "embracing our challenges instead of fighting them." She says that she finds that a person has to have a reason for embracing their difficulties, aside from "because someone told you so." She offers an example and an explanation:

> The reason would be, is that your difficulty is some kind of glass ceiling, and you really want to be on that other side of that glass ceiling because there's more sunshine, and more of what you're seeking on the other side.

Avy continues saying that the difficulty "sorta represents a glass ceiling, and you need to figure out how to break through or go around or develop the skills of glass cutter or something so you can keep moving forward is one way of looking at it." Avy pauses for a moment then she tells me that another way of looking at wellness is "as a skill; the only

way you get better at a skill is by constantly by taking on bigger challenges and being open to knowledge concerting your skill." She analogizes this to obtaining a post-doctorate degree; she stresses that it is "basically all research – being open to finding out more and more (as we say about less and less), but the concept is you're learning." Avy further explains that once you have obtained the "the tools for learning, but you need the skills in order to reach that wellness."

I ask Avy if practice is a part of that learning. She responds by saying that she thinks the analogy of a post doc is a poor one because she thinks most people "really admire a highly skilled person – whether its pilot, knitter, gardener, police officer." She clarifies this more saying that these people have "spent years and years and years honing their skills. It doesn't seem inconsistent with wellness."

I look through my notes once more and ask Avy if the honing these skills is reflected in her emerging tripod of interpersonal skills, manipulation of the physical world to build or create something, and our ability to know our Creator. She responds telling that what is "so interesting to me is that they're so interrelated. When it comes to wellness, it is the opposite of compartmentalized. The only reason why you'd compartmentalize that is so that you can talk about it." She offers another metaphor, this time of knitting. She explains that although it is a mundane activity, once someone learns the skills, "your mind can go into a meditative state." Avy continues to discuss how in that state of meditation, "you begin to see the connections between – the physical aspect of what you're doing and then there's the spiritual aspect of what you're doing. Knitting is a really good example for me for Unity."

Suddenly the phone rings. After the phone call we take a break, put more tea in the carafe, and settle back into our conversation. Avy begins by elaborating on her connection between knitting and unity:

> People need to work together; and actually that is a form of healing from the world, is for people to unify. And that's what unity is – and it's probably never been experienced in its purest form, and so it's something that you can only works towards trying to gain as much understanding as possible. And the process of knitting is where I gained another glimmer of what that must . . . one of the aspects of what that means. That there's all these different forms, lines, that you can create; if something becomes part of a unified whole.

Avy tells me of another example, one of martyrs. She uses the metaphor of weeding in her garden to explain to me this connection with martyrdom. Avy describes how a person determines what a weed is – in a "broccoli patch, Lamb's Quarteris a weed" whereas she states that elsewhere, Lamb's Quarter is "a really nice plant – nutritious, can make flour from it, etc." Avy elaborates further on how she is "creating martyrs out of these wonderful plants . . . . the way the holy books refer to martyrs is like they're feeding something. It's not like someone is sacrificing . . . it's not the sacrifice of life." Avy proposes that instead one is "feeding something by being a martyr. I was like – ah, that's sorta like what these weeds are doing." Avy then excitedly tells me how "weeding is *so* much fun!," and shares another insight. She shares the significance of how the sun is feeding both the weeds and the plants a gardener wants to grow. Avy voices that the mulch helps feed the plants in a more indirect way. She concludes with telling me that

when "there's something that was relatively precious in your garden, a vegetable that you like to eat, is being fed directly by the sun, and indirectly by the weeds that have been well managed."

Avy goes on to tell me about "the spiritual calculus for our day," and differentiates between "intellectual knowledge and spiritual knowledge." Avy informs me about how the "holy books touch on all three of those [our thoughts, our feelings, and how to create in life]. There's the far out spiritual stuff, and then there's the emotional and interpersonal laws [that] direct us." She continues to say that when Jesus told humankind "to love thy neighbor as thyself – that's an emotional thing! That's something that's very, very challenging! But it gives you something to focus on." Avy speaks on how various historical holy books offer people healthy physical edicts, such as not eating cloven hoofed animals two thousand years ago. She said that this would be called a social law, and that "social laws change as your spiritual capacities grow!" Avy gives an example of how a parent treats a two year old versus a ten year old in regards to being next to a road, she exclaims, "the rules of the household he lives in change in regards to him – though *nothing in the physical world has changed*." She concludes this topic by saying that "the physical world has not changed at all, but your, your capacities change. And, the holy books are such a cool history of how it addresses the changes of mankind's spiritual development and messages keep getting more and more complex." She further concludes that " to hone that skill you have to focus on something."

Avy begins speaking about how one of the biggest challenges to being a human is to "figure out what you want to focus on." She decides that this is "the biggest proof of

our need for the holy books that come from our Creator." Avy claims that this "spiritual knowledge" shows us what "we need to focus on in the age in which that message was revealed." I ask Avy what she thought humans needed to focus on in our age. She tells me that, "that mankind is now ready to spiritualize communities i.e., communities can govern themselves based upon spiritual concepts." She continues to explain,

> We not only now have the capacity to govern ourselves as a whole people on the face of the earth, we have it written as a holy book also. You know every eye shall see, every ear shall hear – doesn't mean physically! That means spiritually!

When you hear those spiritual concepts, they're little ah-ha moments. Eventually. This seems a perfect opportunity to segue into question number two. I ask Avy how she thinks communities affect personal well-being. She continues in the spiritual framework from before, emphasizing that we are "created as spiritual beings. Our physical life is sort like a boot camp here, for our souls – that part of us that exists regardless of our body. That's what we're here to develop, is our soul." Avy suggests that if we "sweep it under the rug, that's just something you do where you say your prayers at your family dinner table and everybody's out doing their own thing" then isolation occurs and the "road for the development of community," is blocked. She insists that "people learn from people! I can bring some spiritual knowledge, you know like [sharing] the metaphor of the weeds being martyrs." I tell Avy that I think what she said was a great analogy.

Avy explains how if community members all come together to pray or do a devotional kind of meeting that each person would have their own "equally profound insights they've gained, you know, from their experience in life to that same meeting, and

guess who walks away the richer and guess who walks away the poorer? ***Everybody*** walks away richer, and nobody walks away poorer!" Avy emphasizes how important it is for each community to have this spiritual element where, "we're allowed to just interact on that spiritual level. Without this is the 'right way, or this is the wrong way' – as long as you're not being disruptive, or disrespectful."

Avy talks about some of the social systems currently in place in other parts of the world, and how moving out of them (i.e., a caste system) is "a spiritual step." She continues explaining to me that moving out of something like a caste system is a spiritual move. Avy tells me that laws are not going to help as much as when "communities ***voluntarily*** come together – all aspects of the community come together to solve common problems. And they all see that there's worth in every bit of that." I ask Avy, "Just for clarification: are we given these, um, spiritual guidelines, to help nourish us to be able to have better interpersonal relationships and create in our world?" She responds energetically:

> Focus our master creations! If you want to make the maximum progress – this is where you want to focus your master creators – or not! You don't have to – nobody . . . that's the cool thing about being a human being you don't have to! But, if you want to know – then the first step is like, where you start for a cake, a cake recipe is . . . well, these are the ingredients.

Avy continues with the cake recipe metaphor, explaining how the fashion and order one puts the ingredients together makes a difference in how one's cake turns out. She also points out that if whom you are feeding has never eaten cake, or that they have only had

flat bland cake, they may not know what you are feeding them. Avy becomes more concrete in her examples as she continues, to tell me that this recipe for spiritualized communities is not the kind where God "guiding the world as your clockmaker or something like that - He's just saying, that if your goal is to have healthy communities, these are some of the ingredients you have to have. And He's says something like unity." Avy confesses once more that she does not "really even know what that looks like." I acknowledge Avy with a quiet, "Right," and she elaborates further, stating that we must "make sure that people's basic needs are taken care of; so there isn't a huge divide between wealth and poverty."

We discuss the importance of teaching, and what teaching is. Avy suggests that teaching is often thought of as transferring a skill; but that it is really "expanding somebody's awareness that something exists. Another one is – is that you can be in the process of learning it without being a master at it." This begins a conversation about the necessity for humility in community-building. Avy explains why humility is so important to creating an emotional connection,

> People LOVE you for it! People love you for it if you're sincere and not just beating yourself up. You know what it does? It makes you safe to be around. You're very aware of what your limitations are. Or you're doing your very best. And you're not going to try to impose your limitations on somebody as being the ultimate knowledge . . . It's actually a sneaky way of learning more about what other people know– because then they feel comfortable.

I tell Avy that I really liked her earlier example of having a safe space to share my insights, that this safety is one of my greatest joys in my friendships. Avy expresses her gratitude for these experiences too as she says how wonderful it is to "hav[e] all of this feedback and you go 'wow!' - I don't feel so alone."

Our discussion shifts into how humility and an acceptance of diversity allows friendships to happen. I eventually speak about my observation of how if we took all the words away from our religious texts, and were left with only the guiding spiritual principles, that I thought they would all feel very similar if not identically the same. Avy asks me why I think this is. My response leads us into a discussion in which we each express what I call "distilled essences" and what Avy calls " spiritual truths." We each acknowledge a difference between a "spiritual truth" (Avy) and "cultural clothes" (me).

At this conjecture we have a visitor, and use this break as an opportunity for fetching yet more tea and some blueberry cake. The three of us visit for a while until the visitor has to leave. We easily begin again after our break. Avy spends considerable time talking about how:

> Religion itself is a human interaction with those core truths as they were revealed in the culture, place, time – so there's that human interaction with say - the law of gravity. But these are human interactions with laws of spiritual truth or something like that.

She offers an example of humans increased understanding of how to use gravity instead of perceiving it as a barrier. She speculates how, "sometimes you make real hash out of it – especially when religion is used as say – a political power base." I agree emphatically.

Avy reflects my gravity as she continues in saying that this, "is a source of war! A source of war and conflict – which is not . . . there's nothing in God's - there's no spiritual law that says we become more spiritually strong by going to war."

Avy reminds me that, "I really, really deeply believe that [spiritual truths] don't change. And to get you back to the health of a community – mankind has come to a point where we all could read the holy books." She offers a further elaboration of this connection to community health; She explains that because most of the world could read the holy books now, we could "all come together as communities and look at a thorny problem" bringing new and different insights "how you would apply what [you] understand of the spiritual laws." Avy claims that with this practice "within a community, you'll get enough insights that you'll be able to tackle anything - and you'll have healthy relationships too." She continues to speculate that the "core factor it seems to me, is that human beings want to grow and develop and make a difference in this world they're living." Avy describes how she thinks that "we're getting the physical stuff out of the way, and now we're moving on to the emotional, the health of communities, that sort of thing." She reflects that as humans we do not seem to be able to "live without a challenge; we gotta be doing something."

Avy and I spend some time discussing our respective viewpoints on why each of us thinks there is merit to the overall sense that our communities do not seem well, that people are not happy. Avy summarizes her perspective when she states that "when the faith communities kind of petered, just kind of hanging in there and materialism took off – and we left behind joy too. Joy must be a spiritual reality." I offer to Avy that I had

never thought about joy that way before, and that I found my periods of greatest being when the tripod we had been talking about is balanced in my life – allowing me to experience greater joy.

Avy uses this summary of the tripod to expand on why she lives in the small town she lives in. She details how she feels she "fits right in" and is comfortable here; she tells me that what is "really nice and comfortable about it is that people know me here. That does not mean I'm always really cozy with everybody or maybe with anybody – but – people know me." Avy states that because people know here, they do not have to be afraid of her, they can just think of her as, "Oh! That's just Avy!" She describes how it is comforting to walk down the street and say hi to whose ever there. Avy admits to not remembering many of their names, but that the important past is that "we recognize each other as being part of this place."

Avy goes on to tell me some of the more economic benefits to living in this small town as well, like being able to afford a house and lot that fits her needs. She talks about "fingers of interconnectedness" and how attending community events and recognizing at least half the attendees by sight was comforting. She also strongly emphasizes belonging "to a faith community that *really fits*! It really makes sense to me; it very, very strongly taps into greater knowledge about our spiritual reality." Avy describes to me what has been described as, "the Great Desolation – the want to know the purpose of our lives; to want to what our spiritual reality is that we can understand it - and not know where to turn." The Avy very energetically tells me that she, "do[es]n't have that! Because I have a belief system that actually works – it covers those bases; as well as – there's lots to do!"

She goes on to describe some of the events she participates in at a local level with her faith community.

Soon the discussion turns to Avy's kids, and how she finds that her children "grew up to be neat, fun people to be around – and interesting! They're into things that I'm not necessarily interested in." She describes for me the different interests and activities her (now) adult children are doing. She bespeaks of parenting as an unparalleled joy, and yet also as an investment. Avy states how, "one thing that our society really short-comes each other – is somehow they're not making it clear how important it is to invest in raising your children. And you don't do that with a money investment. It's not a money investment." We spend some time discussing various experiences we each have witnessed in regards to parenting and child rearing. Avy observes that, "if you're not aware of something, you're not going to make it a goal in your life. So, we seem to be really, really clever at cutting off the next generation from the aspect of joy." This shifts the conversation into diversion and communities, Avy exclaims that we go "for fun! We go for happy and fun, and there's nothing wrong with fun, but it shouldn't be the ultimate goal." She emphasizes that the joy is "getting to the destination." Avy relates this destination to our purpose of being. She believes that when the faith communities lost their influence, "the joy got neutralized." She re-emphasizes that joy is a spiritual state.

Avy spends some time telling me the analogy of "the King's clothes." She explains to me that the King's clothes are various religion's "revelations"; eventually, these become frayed, tattered and worn as the King matures. She summarizes this tale by relating it back to healthy communities:

> So – if we keep looking at the shabby clothes we're going to throw ourselves off from healthy communities and relationships. And when the new king's clothes come along – "Oh! Those aren't King's clothes – those don't look anything like the King's clothes I'm used to looking at so that must not be the King wearing those clothes."

Avy says that this "cuts us off from the new teachings of God." She explains that the analogy shows us how we become cut off from spiritual truths because "the clothes are so shabby you don't want to look at them or if we're cut off because we don't *recognize* the King in his new clothes." She concludes that when this happens, "we've cut off that spiritual capacity for joy. Wow – I've never thought of this before – in that way!" Avy's l comment is a perfect opportunity to briefly remind her that this is why she is a co-researcher; that we are truly creating new knowledge through our dialogue!

There is a long pause, I can see that Avy is thinking about something, so I wait. When she begins to speak, she tells me of why she believes that there is spiritual knowledge. She believes that "it isn't just that we live in a wealthy society and in a secure roof over our heads and plenty to eat" nor "learning healthy interpersonal relationships as . . . . there's not a whole lot of examples of that." Avy explains that if "you don't come from a family that has a lot of healthy relationships," then one is left with "being able to tap into that spiritual knowledge."

I told Avy about my experience of having little familial support in relating in healthy ways while growing up, and how incredibly angry I was well into my twenties that I had no role models to learn how to be more relationally healthy. I told her how my

coping mechanism as an adult was to then go out and do my best to create these healthy relationships. I continued, saying "*we know* a lot about what makes healthy relationships but it is hard to either get others to buy into it so that they'll try to practice with you or to recognize that there's even a need for such things." Avy takes this in a surprising direction, she tells me,

> Exactly! It goes back to that whole thing that lucky people are the ones with *visible* handicaps. And you know, if you come from a messed up family – there ain't no way of hiding it. You *know it*, and however you deal with it, everyone else around you knows it too. And so you have to deal with it – or not.

She continues to say that it is the people who do not know that they were raised in "situations that were maybe way more unhealthy than they should have been, and they think that's normal!! We're the lucky ones because *we knew* that stunk! And we were lookin' for something else – on some level." Avy emphasizes that it is the ones who "don't recognize it [who] are the very, very unfortunate ones." I silently nod my head in agreement. It was a new way of looking at my own familial experience.

Avy talks about various programs in the community designed to help families, to offer children a safe emotional and physical place to go, including offering at least one meal a day. She extends her gratitude that there are such programs in place, for "at least a few hours day, a child may hear people saying things other than curse words or manipulating people – that sort of thing." Avy emphasizes how, "just that simple little thing is very important." She continues to elaborate on other programs within the community, and their mixed blessings. One issue she took concern with was the

frequency and consequences of "diagnostic labeling." Avy declares that the solutions are "probably spiritual solutions. That's what we're left with." She tell me that "the solutions to our problems that are popping up in the school because the environments the kids are raised in." Avy explains that the relationships the adults have with "the school and their community, bleeds over into how the kids act with the school and their community." She emphasizes that the basis of our relationships "is our spiritual reality; how we perceive reality dictates a lot of how we interact."

The discussion turns toward how humans "tap into new knowledge." Avy understands new knowledge to be "greater spiritual insight, understanding." She says that she does not think new knowledge appears randomly; she says that she does not believe that "God sends out a spark of knowledge and it just happens to land over there, and they got it. And it's their responsibility to share it or something like that." She explains further that she believes that new knowledge is the "manifestation of a lot of skill building, and an investment in knowledge and just experience. But it's not just an ah-ha – suddenly I know how to paint the Mona Lisa and I'm going to do it." Avy strongly emphasizes that there is "a lot behind it; there's a lot of *intent!*" She tells me that there is not "a religion on the face of the earth that doesn't have skill-building processes that you practice if you want to grow closer to God." Avy describes how getting closer to God is "basically getting more knowledge . . . more skills. And it's the *same thing* – meditation, prayer, reading the holy writings, and following the instructions in the holy writings to the best of your ability." She continues to say that people receive this knowledge in a myriad of ways, including dreams or as a result of prayer.

Here we come to another natural breaking point. We take some time to just relax and, of course, refill our tea cups. When we begin again, I ask Avy to share her best and worst periods in life, lasting at least two weeks in length. Avy begins by describing to me her hometown. The details she offers, and by her own admittance, conclude that her growing up years were spent in a very homogenous place, Avy claims that in living there, "in some ways it was very stable and in some ways it was very isolated." She tells me how almost all of the residents worked for the same organization, and that similar to military bases, there often was no extended family within the town.

Avy describes her elementary school as a place of comfort. She informs me that she was treated well, "for whatever reason I think the schools were really, really, good – from what I remember I never had a teacher treat me badly." However, for Avy home did not feel safe. She recalls that what she remembers about her childhood was "terrorism at home. Which I wasn't aware that it wasn't something weird about me. That for some reason your dad doesn't like you and your mom is terrified all the time." Avy describes her household as, "filled with fear all the time." She continues telling me that, "there were threats of physical violence that culminated maybe half dozen times a year but . . . the fear was worse, the disparagement and that sort of thing." Avy confides that, "part of the worst – I *knew* I lacked experience and knowledge about things that people took for granted." She elaborates further telling me that by adolescence, "you're pretty well cemented and you carry around tapes that you never get rid of. You're aware it's a tape and it doesn't work anymore – you know, so you put it on low volume." Avy declares that a person "becomes what you're reacting to. And eventually you become . . . you're

lucky if you become more skilled at that." She concludes that growing up was "a great learning experience for me – it set me up for a great man things. I didn't have a lot of fears that a lot of other people had." Avy spends some time at this point talking about the lessons she had learned, and that as an adult she realized that one does not have to live with, "disparagement, emotional abuse, physical abuse . . . . I don't have to feel guilty about whether it's right or wrong. Looking back I can see what I was reacting to."

She describes a fond memory during elementary school of a self-organizing baseball game continuously played during throughout all three recesses. Avy explains how the kids brought all of their own gear, kept score, and even voluntarily played co-ed with little fuss. She remembers how in the winter it was too cold to play baseball, so they played Keep Away instead. Avy observes that this greatly changed the dynamics of play, and the teams were exclusively girl versus boy, with the boys having the ball the majority of the time. She also remembers the large pile-ups teat occurred playing Keep Away.

This brings Avy to thinking about the sixth grade. She tells me that, "it got really vicious. It got really bad. I was never totally friendless – there was usually one person who liked me." She describes herself then as,

> I was sort of the scapegoat. You know there's always the kid who's like a chicken with no feathers, who other kids make fun of. Totally tolerated. You could play games and that sort of thing – but you do *one little odd or stupid thing*, they just **jump on you!** Somehow you have this label on you: I'm used to being abused.

I ask Avy if she had any support groups of any kind. Upon reflecting on it, she decides that she did. She talks about being a part of Girl Scouts for many years, and that, "it has

an effect . . . even after high school, in high school, some of them took you under their wing – they'd let you hang around if you wanted to." Avy describes it a bit more explaining that these relationships "didn't have to be all touchy-feely relationships – just there. And you knew they were there."

After some time, Avy describes a little about her divorce. She does not claim it to be a "worst time," but it was "not a highlight of my life by any means – with hindsight I'm real glad it happened when it happened, before the kids reached adolescence. They were still quite young." Avy reflects about embracing one's difficulties, "in order to learn from them." She states that low points are "a culmination of a lot of things needing correcting." Avy uses this momentum to describe the difference between having a low point as an adult versus as a kid:

> When you're an adult, you have some control. If you're a kid in a fearful, abusive situation, there isn't a helluva a lot that you contributed tot hat. You're more helpless in that sense. That's why that's so low – whereas you go through your stumbling blocks as an adult – you can get more in the mood of, "Well, what can I learn from this?" - cuz you're not just a victim! I get to choose, at least somewhat. Yes – it's different. Very different.

For the remaining part of the interview, we discuss marriage. I ask Avy if she has anything she wants to say about marriage and well-being. She tells me that she has thought a lot about this topic and she has come up with this understanding that it is a complex topic, but that she had come to realize that the reason "people pin so much on that spousal relationship is because they see it as a source of happiness. My relationship

with you determines whether or not I'm happy." Avy then says that this is how people "psych themselves out" because "relationships change – because *I* change . . . a lot. Maybe they're changing too. That's not my business." Avy observes that somehow we think "marriage should be like a honeymoon – that's why they write stories about it – *because* it's so unusual!" Avy pauses a moment to laugh, then continues, "I mean – you gonna write stories about how you paint your home together?!" I add to the spirit of things by commenting, "Right! Who wants a movie about knitting or weeding a garden?! Even if they are mundane things that give us great joy!"

Avy uses this as a platform to talk about the finer inner workings of what a marriage is. She tells me of how her faith community describes marriage as "a fortress of well-being." She notes that this statement is not defining marriage itself, but instead, "its role." She explains that she realized that it is not "whether he is good to me and I'm good to him or whether we fulfill each other or not – that's not the fortress part. The fortress part is the marriage itself." Avy states that the relationship itself "has to have a purpose. There has to be a purpose for this other than my own personal happiness." Avy goes on to analogize this with a business partnership. She contends that one "does not go into a business because you like each other so much – it's because there's an activity that you can both bring your talents to, and the activity is probably something you both enjoy." Avy continues providing additional insight stating that "people don't look at marriage as being something other than themselves related to somebody else – they don't see it as an activity, or *an investment in this activity*!" She analogizes more with the business partnership, claiming that business partners have "automatic investment in the

partnership," and that because of this they must "figure out how [they're] going to meet the challenges of the day." Avy adds that she hopes partners will, "discuss, consult – hopefully without a whole lot of personal baggage involved." She provides an application of this perspective:

> If there is personal baggage, you can say, "You know, I think that might not be a part of the business problem. And I don't think the business has resources to address that problem. I know this is probably very painful for you but the partnership can't *fix that*. So being mad at me, because I'm your partner, so I'm the other part of the business that's going to hold you back from *fixing that problem*, it is a road to nowhere.

I affirm Avy's stance, and conclude, "like what you were saying about love – that love is not just a feeling. It's the enactment of it everyday." She responds emphasizing again that, "every action needs a purpose. So what action are you going to take? Be pleasant just because? Well - we should be doing that with everybody!"

Avy and I end the interview with a brief recursive move bringing us back to the concept of purpose. Avy concludes that, "purpose frames the question, it frames the conversation." At this point, Avy and I run out of time. I must be going home, as we have spent the entire afternoon having this conversation. We say a friendly good bye and I leave.

3.3 Peter's Lebenswelt

Peter and I have known one another for a handful of years. We decide to meet at my house for the interview. Once more, an afternoon beverage is in order. As the coffee

brews, and I set up additional interviewing equipment, Peter has fun theatrically introducing himself to the camera. Once "introductions" are made to the camera, and coffee is in-hand, we review the Informed Consent form. He look directly into the camera and stresses how "voluntary" such events are when one has social obligations to friends. We both laugh, and he more formally addresses the camera to state his "true voluntary" status, before I suggest that we should begin before he takes up too much more camera time.

Good-heartedly, I begin by telling Peter, "Let's begin with something easy. Describe for me your idea or concept of wellness or well-being." He immediately laughs, "Oh that's *easy*!" He tells me that he is writing a book about this, but to generally describe well-being he would use the words "wholeness, harmony, and beauty – and congruent to that would be a sense of belonging that is fully integrated into the individual and the collectively lived human life." I say,"Wow! That's a lot. Great! Tell more about what you see as wholeness." Peter begins enthusiastically describing wellness by what it is not:

> Thus wholeness is not: various forms of public corruption – secret dealings where people exchange bribes for favors and the like; it is not bullying – it is not a local warlord or potentate or even just influential person ruling everything according to his or her own desire and will and the rest of the community is forced to go along; it is not the absence of communal consultation; it is not a sharply dis-equitous distribution of wealth where the few have much and the many have little.

Peter speaks quickly, and I continue to simply nod my head to affirm I am listening. He continues to say that wellness is "not an exploiter-exploitee relationship of the community with the land base." Peter then switches to an affirmative description of what well-being is:

> You could say that manifestations of it would be things like clean drinking water, safe food to eat, a general comfort and ease in relationships with one's neighbors; a general feeling in a community of good regard, people regarding each other with mutually supportive mindset or attitude and a feeling of well-being; a lot of person-to-person, family-to-family cooperation.

He pauses for a moment, and reflects that, " those are almost more like signs or symptoms of this thing that is deeper that is sorta easier to say, look around and see so much in our society that we take for granted." Peter continues to speak of the "opposite of wholeness." He declares that we have "fragmentation; we have anomie." He takes a breath and tells me that "it is not the tragic event where it so happens in our culture where somebody is dying inside slowly so badly - no one knows . And eventually – they kill themselves – and no one figured out why it happened." Peter says that there are times that no one even knows, that "sometimes people do bury deep within their pain. Well, in our society we would say that is inevitable, there's a lot of reasons to hide such things – you're not allowed to really show them."

He pauses briefly to take a sip of coffee, before he continues just as enthusiastically to describe what a "world of wholeness" would entail. He declares that in a world of wholeness a person "wouldn't feel this pressure nearly so much to bury and

hide deep anguish. People would find out! Because you could talk!" Peter describes how there would be a "*high* level of public trust! Like a really, extremely high level of public trust. I think there would be a lot less judgment in a society of wholeness, for that human foibles – even the particularly bad things." He details how when a person has "dark secrets that no one can ever talk about" it means that, "you can't solve the problem that's behind the secret, or heal from genuine sins or crimes. You can never get healing if you can't bring it into the open. So there's no opportunity for truth and reconciliation."

I continue to silently nod my head to affirm his statements and to encourage him to continue. He repeats that in a world of wholeness, "there's a high degree of truth and reconciliation; there's a high degree of trust." Peter goes on to talk about how "forgiveness is a really high part of the social milieu; autonomy and self-reliance are important! But not individualism!" Peter makes a sharp distinction between autonomy and self-reliance and individualism. He discusses how individualism is a "a doctrine, or a dogma, or an ideology, or even mythology of the fiercely independent entrepreneur or pioneer overcoming the obstacles." I take this short pause as an opportunity to clarify, "So, one of the things I hear you saying a lot of is that this wholeness is truly . . . not just self, but a social structure – things we do in relationship?" Peter responds, "I don't know that I would get all formal, and say 'S*ocial Structure.'*" He drinks some coffee while pausing briefly before going on:

> I can see that word would apply, but I would say – No! This is a . . . sense of truly and deeply belonging to your *larger* human community, but not *just* your human community – your ecological community! You have relationships with the

> animals in your environment; and the plants in your environment. Those are not seen as . . . you know in our world now there is a sharp distinction between the human and the nonhuman. And you can't have it really be believable that you can have a relationship with a tree. . . or a relationship with a patch of land. If somebody refers to that – it is metaphorically only.

I continue to nod in support. Peter describes what it would be like to have an actual relationship with the land, "where they communicate with you in various ways, you apprehend what they're saying, you pay attention, concentrate; you mull it over – and you respond. And they respond back." He states that this is "an idea we don't have, and yet in a world of wholeness, I think that would be essential that we do have those kinds of things!" Peter pauses again, then rescinds his initial response about social order as he says, "So, yes! There is a social structure, there is an ecological structure – there is this *communal structure* that you belong in a place, and you want to belong there! And it affirms you, and in return, you affirm it!" I interject observing that Peter's affirmative examples of wholeness sound much like what others have been calling 'harmony'. Peter responds energetically,

> Yeah! The reason I'm saying Wholeness, Harmony, and Beauty is because these can't really be dissected out as individual – they are intertwined! These are concepts that are woven together. So – this is really a weave. A dialogic weave or something – I don't really know the term.

I chuckle, "It'd be color contrast knitting!" He agrees, then qualifies the metaphor saying that the knitting is not "with cloth or reed or yarn but with relationships between

individuals and their immediate world." I offer an, "mmmhhmmm," and he begins to address "a larger consciousness." Peter tells me of a book by Ursula K LeGuinn whom he feels, "brings forth a really wonderful insight in her *Four Ways to Forgiveness* distinguishing between local time and historical time. Those were her technical terms." He then describes local time as, "time lived in respect to your own community, land base, place. Your own social milieu. The existing rules for 'how things are *rightly* done' with respect to a given place, time, people who have developed their own life ways." Peter tells me that local time is much like how "an indigenous people" think in "terms of - this is the way of this is the way its been done since the time of the ancestors, so we do it that way now." He confides that as a culture, "we need more of that - that we don't have this."

> Next, Peter describes historical time as being:
>
> able to see that just as people have lived in accordance with a particular set of local rules and local time; over here [he uses wide arm gestures to indicate 'here'] – other people live in terms of another set of integrated, highly reinforced, very rich, harmonious sets of rules – a wholeness! But there might be very big differences - over here [another wide arm gesture for 'here'].

Peter offers an example of one tribe piercing "the broad end of our sticks when we are assembling our fish traps," and another tribe somewhere else says a little prayer and "pierces the narrow end, and we sit it in water a while to acknowledge the importance of our fish trap to the creatures we are trying to take for our food." He continues to say that in both cases "there are deep reasons as to why we do this – it has to do with - it *tells us that we are in a relationship*!" He pauses just for a moment to emphasize the importance

of the last statement, before he continues, "and we could create a scenario where these people would argue bitterly, and we'd fight a terrible war over their difference." He softens his voice, "people have tended to do this." He pauses for a moment, then offers how historical time is potentially beneficial; he tells me that it "gives you a perspective to say: the existence and presence of these ways of being, are integrated and whole and within themselves." Peter adds from outside "of it you can see that this is something we do and we can compare and contrast them." He explains further that the "advantage of having a historical time, in that sense, is that it would allow people from one place to accept the ways and practices – they may be *very different* – than the practices of others." Peter reflects that while he is "making a silly example of the fish trap – that's one thing. But we have some things in our culture that have become *very* divisive."

Peter becomes very deeply serious as he explains the "purposeful" divisiveness by some groups regarding homosexuality, verifying that indeed in other cultures it is regarded with acceptance. He then explains how historical time could address this issue:

> So, when you're a Christian fundamentalist - it's perfectly valid and legitimate to say one cannot be a homosexual. Fine! You're a Christian fundamentalist and that's your world, your truth, your local time. But you can step over here and say – in this world, in this place of people, who do not have that particular view - you can. And again, it's perfectly fine – it's legitimate.

Peter further explains that historical time allows a kind of "wholeness" that allow one to find a way "we can find that which we agree upon, and we will interact with each other as different groups on the basis of that upon which we *agree*." He describes how groups

can let what they disagree upon "be inside - the walls, if that's the word – the boundaries of our difference."

Peter takes a drink of his coffee, then says very adamantly, "We do this individually *all the time*!" He espouses that as individuals "we sort of grant this autonomous, individual perspective and way of being and allows for a lot of individual foible, and we manage to work together and find that upon which we agree." I nod in agreement. He continues, much more softly,

> And yet, somehow, in our groups – we can't do that. Or refuse to do it. So – it would include that – it has to, I think, allow us to see our local relationships and allows us to grant the local relationships of other people equal validity!

Peter reaches a place of conclusion and pauses for a few moments. I ask him, "Do you want to add anything to the sense of belonging? With the wholeness, harmony, and beauty paralleling that?" He responds with a lengthy reply regarding belonging as "one of those strands in the weave. We all know when we've felt like we belong to something. And yet, often in our culture now, especially now, it seems to be something of a temporary thing." Peter tells me that in a world of wholeness, "in the context of wellness and well-being – you have this sort of experience as part of everyday life!" He offers some examples:

> You'd still do things for an intense experience, interests – putting on a play or whatever – playing music, dancing together - all of this would be integrated into the community for everyone! Why you'd probably have communal rituals where everybody sings, dances, or goes to the play or the communal celebration!

Peters suggests that the small town he lives in has a hint of this. He claims that it is, "one of the things that has kept this place far more alive as a community than many other places I've been of equal size." He talks about a few of the local events, and how these events "have a cementing quality, a 'pulling together' – Oh! We do these things *together* – this is who we are!" Peter spends some time offering criticisms about local groups including some of the racism issues, the "prohibitionist" thinking that "judges non-addicted people for enjoying any alcoholic beverage ever!" But, he claims, "you have all these different opinions and points of view – and yet – people are bound together - yes! We are in the same community, we belong here, this is [town name]!" Peter admits that though the current town of residence is "probably far from what I think would happen in a fully integrated wholeness, healthy communal relationship – it's still has something that is significantly missing from a lot of places."

Peter then spends some time telling me about his experiences in another Alaskan town, larger than the town we are both currently living in. Peter discusses how this other town "has no unifying sense! Of [place]-ness that is shared by everyone, and has nothing like this where people come together." He tells me how there are "large interest blocks" that have some membership but that they "sometimes get into sharply bitter, very divisive, nasty, politicized conflicts with other interest groups!" Peter pauses, and softens his tone, "and there's nothing that community does to heal that. There's no healing process either – there's only one side - competition – alone!"

The natural lull at this point seems appropriate for me to share another co-researcher's experience of a small town similar to the one we live in, but off the highway

network. In this town, the interviewee claimed that unlike our town's sixty to seventy percent attendance record for community events, all three hundred people come to that town's events. The interviewee said that, "they understand that they are *supposed* to come. And that they are *welcomed*." Peter speculates about why our community does not have this. He suggests it's partially because of our location with access to the road networks, and in relative short distance to Fairbanks, which has "been eroded by The American Standard Plan." I ask Peter to explain The American Standard Plan. He spends a great amount of time explaining to me what this is. He explains the systemic pressure to conform to "an urban environment," and to perceive one's residence as "your *castle* that is, in and of itself, completely socially, economically, spiritually, emotionally – everything – distinct! Sharply distinct!" He looks very intense, and continues speaking forcefully as he details how these "individual kingdoms" are "socially competitive and spatially isolating." Peter describes in detail the social structures in place that define and enforce "a whole host of commercial and political purposes." He offers an example:

> It is understood that you are going to work for one of those entities and you're going to get some kind of token reward, token numeration - that you can then exchange for goods and services that come from far away to centers of distribution. And depending on what form of work you do, where it sits on the socio-economic hierarchy – depending on that is where you are going to go to, which centers you're going to enter to get the goods and services. These are - actually have certain kind of hierarchy themselves. There's the high end, really

> specialized, up-scale grocery store; then, there's the mid-range grocery store, then there's the little grocery store.

Peter's intensity piques with, "Then in some **horrible places!** In America now, in inner cities – you don't even have a grocery store! You have a QuickStop and fast food joints. Because *that's where you are* along the scheme of things." He is very passionate about this issue and continues with his assessment;

> This is understood to be right, and good, and proper order of things! It is understood that you will work at a job, the work you will do that will be what you're assigned, and will not largely have anything to do with what-is-important-to-you. You're just to do this – except for the few, rare people who don't have to do this – the ones at the very top get to have a lot of say. That their work - their work is in accordance with their creative interests. But most people – it's understood that, "No – that's not important! You just have to do what you're told."

Then he stops, and he says with a tone of incredulity, "And you do it – for the reward (if you can call it that) - is that you get to go into the different shopping-distribution centers and get the . . . more and more things every year." Then, he shakes his head, telling me, "and those things you get are the reward for putting up with all this crap! And this is considered acceptable! Proper! Right! And good! And it's considered the *highest form* of human life available to us on this planet!" He explains that it is "sold continuously by propaganda agents of those entities that manufacture and distribute the goods through advertisements." Peter tells me in a hushed voice, "and this is a continuous message that

is given to us from the very earliest moments in a human life in this society. This is the truest and highest aspect – and should be *exported as a matter of national policy*." Peter is very passionate about this. I continue to support him throughout with lots of eye contact and head nods. He pauses and says, "I could go on but perhaps you get an idea of the American Standard Plan from what I've said – I'm just extemporizing."

I laugh saying, "So, I'm assuming you don't think this is the model for wholeness, harmony, beauty?" He very energetically responds:

> NO! No! This is the **opposite!** It is the anti-thesis of everything that matters most! That's the reason I say – when you look around and say, "Hey – wait minute! What you just said about wholeness and good community [scratches chin dramatically] – we don't have much of that." I would say the American Standard Plan is standing in direct opposition to almost every single one of those.

Peter goes on to explain how when people who do find a measure of wellness, they do not find it "*because of the American Standard Plan – they find it in spite of* or contrary to!" He goes on to further explain how some groups form enough of a cohesion that people feel that they belong to something greater than themselves. Peter uses an example of a religious organization. In the best of times in a congregation, Peter explains:

> When you went before God, in the presence of your fellow members of the congregation, you-were-all-one-people. And you were all equal as individuals. No mater how much money you had outside the church, no matter how much connection to politics you had, no matter what you did – when you came into that place, you were all just before God. You were all individuals that were

> bringing your own troubles and worries and uncertainties and sins to God; and then the community would see you as one of their membership – and another person. Not an individualist, just another person, and they were like you and you were like them and there was forgiveness. It would be the *only way* you could function.

Peter uses this as a segue to talk about how people have begun forming friendships on-line. I nod for Peter to continue. He thoughtfully resumes telling me that he thinks what people are "trying to do is get back to the thing that's missing – the closest thing to the act of the American Standard Plan on meeting this need – is FaceBook - where it's a product." Peter pauses, then says that our society is "actually trying to commoditize now a basic human need for community. Which I find deeply troubling!"

Peter takes a brief break to drink his coffee. I offer to Peter "if you believe that the divine is everywhere; having a sense of individual and collective lives intermingling in healthy ways – makes a tremendous amount of sense." Peter begins to tell me that this is why he thought the movie *Avatar* was so appealing to so many people, "for a moment there, people could identify with the Na'vi, and in a sense feel a hint of what it meant to belong!" He continues to comment, saying that part of sense of belonging was the "tangible relationship with the that deity which was basically all of life on that planet! They were *connected* and people wanted to feel that." I confided that I was one of those people. I told Peter that for me it was about the all interconnected relationships the movie portrayed. He responds saying that he was not interested in the war scenes, nor the

"straight forward" plot, but deeply moved by the "successful portrayal of what it must be like to *belong* to a world, and *belong* to a people!"

We discuss more about *Avatar;* each of us speak about our inferences on what being a warrior meant to the Na'vi, and how different warfare would have been compared to our long human history of "extermination, assimilation, or exclusion" (Peter). This moves us into discussions regarding colonialism and its historical and recent affects. We pause for a few moments at the gravity of the issues we have been talking about.

I tell Peter that I think this is a good segue into having him describe for me his perspective on how community affects personal well-being. Peter begins talking about individualism as an ideology. He says that he thinks "one of the biggest problems with the dogma of individualism is that it has a definition of identity that is highly within-the-skin, within-the-brain, within-the-individual-person," and that identity and selfhood is, "**MINE!** There's a line, it's right around me! There's me – and then there's not-me! Sharply defined! Bright line of distinction. Well, that's one of the problems." Peter describes how we become who we are; he says that what "makes us 'us' – the nexus of experience, connection, and what makes me Peter – is all coming from outside. It's my daily connections." He further describes some of those possible connections, then exclaims , "that's who I am! I'm mostly not in here!" He points to his chest. Peter advocates that "personal identity and the autonomous individual acting in the world – they are a node in a network of an intricate filigree of relationships! So, the community and the individual blend in together." He emphasizes that this does not indicate that "you

aren't an individual actor, or the ideal community wouldn't grant maximum scope for human action."

I bring out a colorful blanket I am crocheting, placing an end of it on the table. I state that relationship, and hence identity, is very much like knitting or crochet. We both look closer; Peter holds up a string, "I'm the purple string." I respond, "Or maybe not even the string, but that node . . ." I point to an intersection of yarn. Peter nods, I continue, "I mean, this was dynamic at one point, so it – but there's still tension," I pull on an area of the blanket that moves the point that we are looking at, "there's still connection there, there's still . . ." Peter informs me that this is where the analogy breaks down. He says that because we are dynamic, we would always be "moving, always going round in its localized area – sometimes reaching out to other areas – but again, it is still with respect to where it is. And it's defined by – its identity is defined by all of those connections!"

Peter thinks for a moment, then tells me about what he has read recently about the effects of solitary confinement. He tells me that it turns out to be "one of those brutally, torturous things we can do," he continues on to say that, "it actually modifies the person's brain structure, they're whole way of being a human is – ***erased!*** It turns out people who have long experience with that, they're never the same again." Peter brings the idea of ostracism to the forefront. He describes how banishment was used as form of punishment for serious crimes, and that sometimes this was considered, "worse than being condemned to die. And it was probably. You are all of the sudden now without your context." He explains further, "you can no longer live with the people and the meaning

structures and the rituals and the lifeways and the foods and the housing – everything that you know." Peter confesses that "if you *survive* the transition to another people maybe something would come of it, but it's extremely hard to do that. Even now we sometimes have a hard time dealing with a change like that."

I acknowledge this verbally. We take a short break and eat some lunch. When we reconvene for the interview, I ask Peter how he thinks communities affect personal well-being. Peter immediately says, "They are strongly interactive! They define each other! The collective of individuals defines the community in a deep way, but the *community defines their identities*." He reflects upon the dangers of a community not practicing "historical time and historical truth" in conjunction with "local time and local truth"; that the "local way can become the *only way*" including "local warlords" who "would enslave most of the population," as well as, "other strange, creepy memes that come into highly localized settings. Things about human sacrifice for example." He goes on to talk about the "localized reasoning" of historical and modern slavery around the world. Peter reflects for a moment then continues, "So, here's our problem we confront then, a check! Some sort of check upon extremity!" Peter tells me about:

> Where we run across even questions of localized community and individual identity – as sometimes you can have an individual's (cuz we change the community with our actions) – a particularly strong or focused individual who may have some problems or issues – they can map those onto the larger community.

Peter then describes the "*very nasty and destructive* human qualities" such as, "gossip that can spread to a community level." Peter decides that "any part of wholeness would probably have to include a community's sense of its own health." He spends some time thinking aloud about the value of "reflection and practicing awareness" on an individual and a communal level. Peter speculates that this is where a person or community could "look at where they are making mistakes or whether they are succeeding, and be willing to forgive themselves, and also be willing to apologize, and to redirect if they err." He tells me that, "there'd be a lot of attention to self-care! Spiritually, as well as, emotionally, for the collective of the community." Peter then poses a question:

> Why is that possible in a vision that says our individuality is made up by our community, and our community is made up by this dynamic interaction between all these individuals whose identities are defined in the context they're found in?

He suggests that it is because "you're not practicing a form of denial" that states that "the community and I are completely distinct entities. And all the community is, is a collective – a sort of body of a lot of people that came together in whatever happened." Peter explains that instead there is an understanding that "because we're interacting strongly and our identity and our individuality is deeply defined by our communal relationships, and our community relationships are deeply defined by how we choose as individuals – *we must be conscious of it.*"

He pauses once more, then continues telling me of how he thinks that one of the worst effects of "the dogma of individualism is its form of *denial*!" He emphasizes that

"this dogma" provides, "profound political and economic advantages to a few people at the top of the socio-economic pyramid in the American society – in the American Standard Plan. And that's why it gets reinforced." Peter sips his coffee, and describes to me how the Na'vi in *Avatar* demonstrate the kind of community-individual autonomy and self-reliance that he understands to be "healthy."

Peter then adds a new dimension to the current conversation; he tells me that he thinks in a world of wholeness we would address our "desire to challenge ourselves" on individual levels and as a collective. Peter speculates that this desire may manifest as "making a new thing, or making a new piece of beauty," or that this desire may manifest as a form of rigorous honesty and reflection. He says one example of this would be individuals within communities who are "culture bearers." Peter describes culture bearers as a people who are willing to say, "We are confronted with this crisis, I have to behave a different way as an example to my people because I see this change." He tells me about a story in the book "Lila" by Robert M. Pirsig about a young man who is "a culture bearer" and this man's trials and tribulations for being one. Peter describes how for a long time this person is "at odds with his community, and yet what he ends up doing is bringing an important newness there – helping them confront a challenge." Peter emphasizes that because this man is in a "kind of interactive relationship, with an individuality defined by community" that he has to live with "a kind of stress and estrangement, which wouldn't be there – if you didn't have this kind of relationship." Peter takes a moment to reflect, and then offers me an example of how someone as "a remarkable and admirable" Martin Luther King Jr. is singled out as an *individual* who led the way for the Civil Rights

Movement, rather than as "part of a body of people who worked with him, around him – sometimes in contrary with him." He emphasizes that it is an "American mythology" that social change, or anything, happens because of individual impetus; "and even someone who leads – it depends on *everyone*!" Peter concludes that this is an "ideological mythology that we're in that causes us to tell ourselves it works that way, we're not paying attention to the way it really works."

At this point in the interview, we agree that it is time to take a break before moving on to the next half. We refill our coffee mugs and pursue some small talk to lighten up the atmosphere a bit. After about twenty minutes, we decide that we are ready to tackle the more personalized half of the interview.

I explain to Peter that this half of the interview is his opportunity to tell me about the best and the worst periods of his life. These periods should be at least two weeks long, they may be defined in any other way he saw fit (episodic, thematic, etc) and from any time period in his life. And lastly I say that he may begin with which ever period felt the most appropriate.

Peter ponders aloud for a while before deciding which period of his life he wants to share publicly. He decides that he will talk about some recent marital issues, as "they are fresh in my mind." He tells me that:

> One of the worst periods in my life - in recent history - was a long series of weeks of strife at home. I - my spouse and I had an interval of ongoing conflict – I think it was mostly low-level bickering and irritability. Often though it was punctuated by outright fighting!

Peter softens his voice and tells me this occurred "more or less unrelieved" without having "intervals of affection, care or truly restful recreation." He confides that this was very difficult because his first marriage, "had a slow and agonizing death," through which he "vowed never to live like that again - I would rather live completely alone rather than live like that." He describes his inner struggle as "not wanting to too-hastily throw the thing overboard - on account of something short-term and out of the ordinary," and yet felt "stuck in a conflict that seemed to go on and on and on" without significant or "meaningful resolution." He says that he still does not know the "nature of the conflict," and that, "after a lot of thought, realized that whatever we were fighting about wasn't the real issue."

Peter tells me that this felt so painful because it seemed that for the last five years of their relationship, "we both dedicated ourselves to our commitment to each other with good will, an amount of self-awareness – and good insight. It really seemed to allow our marriage to flourish. I had felt we had gotten quite somewhere. Far, even." He continues to inform me that, "whenever I reflected that we had managed to come so far – we had no small measure of . . . simpatico - of shared vision," he felt encouraged. Peter describes that him and his spouse managed to create "an appropriate space into our partnership" that allowed "each of us sufficient scope" to follow "our personal interests and share what was there to be shared."

He marvels at the "startling differences" between him and his wife and yet just "how much we turned out to share in common." At this point he interjects that their years together "point to some of the best times in my life." He tells me that this conflict seemed

to "drag on" to such a degree that he felt that "we had moved so far *backwards* in our relations – in our communication! In our trust! And even in our expectations of good will! That it seemed as though NONE of the work – NONE - existed anymore." Peter says that the worst part was feeling like their relationship no longer seemed to "hold any power to resolve anything. Good will was missing."

Peter reflects that there always seemed to be "some hidden agenda" that blocked any effort to work through matters "in honesty and good faith." He emphasizes how "dark and fulsome" the animosity was, and that, again, he did not understand what it was all about. Peter describes how it would have been easier if one person could just "admit they were being an asshole," but because the whole conflict felt so nebulous, that either party admitting guilt "still could not explain it." He reflects how sometimes conflict seems to be caused by "reasons so deeply buried in experience, habit and . . . some other mysterious source . . . that the reasons for them don't see the light of day. Perhaps ever."

He pauses for a while. He tells me about how although this happened a few months back, things do not seem "as they once were." Peter says that he feels a much amplified "wariness in both of us – it affects things far more than ever before, except perhaps, as it might have been in the first months" of their marriage. I ask Peter if he had any support outside of his marriage. He tells me that he knows of "no one with whom I have a sufficiently trusting friendship" that would "enable me to freely and frankly talk about," or seek advice for, "what has gone on between my spouse and I." He admits that this is a "dangerous position" for him to be in, but he was not sure what kind of advice could have been given "that would have helped anyway." Peter goes on saying that a

friendship in this case, would seem to perhaps offer "some kind of relief from the pressure – to be able to talk to a third party" but he feels that he has none of these kind of friendships. Peter describes the bounds of his two closest friendships as one having "certain rules about what you're allowed to talk about" and the other being more "humorous and light-hearted." Peter says he thinks talking to these friends would embarrass all of them if he spoke about marital "anguish."

I quietly acknowledge Peter through a lot of head nodding. He spends some additional time talking about friendship, and the different levels of friendship that he has heard of. He tells me that his friendships "have never been" like "alternate marriages, with nearly everything that can be shared with a spouse being shared between friends." He continues to tell me that perhaps in an ideal community, "perhaps these built-in friendship boundary rules would slowly erode." He reflects aloud saying, "perhaps, I am too guarded." Peter continues rather gravely:

> The habits of being guarded - they arise not out of context! But out of a personal history filled with loneliness! Dread! Stuff I'm not sharing in this interview. These have proven to give me strong survival value – and - they are not easily changed.

Peter concludes that the most difficult aspect of all of this conflict between his spouse and him was the "simultaneous feelings of pointlessness and inevitability"; from which he comes away feeling "profoundly convinced that there is something dreadfully wrong in the heart of human beings." He is afraid that he is "covered by the stain of it or . . .

remain inwardly affected by it." I am unsure of what to say, so I do not say anything, but do my best to affirm Peter throughout his disclosure.

Peter pauses for a while then begins to describe his best times, which, also are with his spouse. He describes how the last three and a half years (prior to this long conflict) were "perhaps the best times I have ever known in the company of other people." He admits there was definitely an "initial year of learning to live together in a small space." But he felt "comforted," as it seemed that "so many of the mistakes I'd made in other close relationships weren't happening." He describes how it seemed he had learned "to grant the same sort of autonomy to my partner that I asked for myself," without "forgoing the kinds of deep discussion - personal sharing - that opens one shared life to another."

He brightens when he tells me that other couples (at least to some degree) were attracted by the example of "our partnership. It seemed to me that simply by being who we were . . . learning how to be together as a couple - we were shining our light before the world in a way that offered some measure of blessing." Peter likens this to how a well-made work of art in a public place might bless those who notice it.

He tells me very seriously how important it is to him to "not fool oneself," and the "positive sign of verification" helped him believe in their relationship's perceived "health" and "aptitude." Peter talks about how the play in his marriage was "heartfelt," plans were made and "sustained even if they were hard to do," and that there was much time spent in conversation. He explains how their talks were sometimes in disagreement, sometimes in agreement, and most often "in an exchange of views and experiences of the

kind from which one comes away knowing that one has much about which to think, and from which to learn." Peter says that they "shared hardship, sometimes, and for the most part remained cheerful throughout with each other." He describes how they "more or less managed to cope" with "petty differences in opinion or the ways of doing things," even when these "led to inevitable human disputes." Peter recollects that even "emotionally involving disputes" were not "lasting or resentment building."

He spends some time reflecting on the qualities that he admires in his spouse. This includes Peter "not idealizing her, but simply appreciating the solid foundation of inner truth upon which she'd built her life." He articulates that his admiration that she could act according to good or bad social dictates and "still remain well-founded within her own being, anchored to the core of her inner truth." Peter continues to tell me of some examples of the qualities he explained, such as "not taking my crankiness personally" or "not allowing my gloomy view to color her generally cheerful and optimistic outlook." He appreciates "her lack of defensiveness – when she's at her best." He confides that there were times when he would say to himself, "what I thought or imagined to be happiness was nothing like its day-to-day . . . matter-of-fact experience!" Peter talks for a while about how words are difficult to express the experience of both sorrow and happiness – but that it seemed to him that his happiness was not overlooked by his friends.

Peter concludes the interview with some commentary on his lack of experience in feeling that he belongs to a community. He summarizes his thoughts by saying that he suspects that belonging " a community, a *true community* like as characterized in M.

Scott Peck's *The Road Less Traveled* . . . would be . . . in its own fashion as difficult and challenging (maybe even perilous) as being a part of an intimate relationship."

The interview reaches its natural conclusion. We share some left over lunch, and chat a while over another cup of coffee.

3.4 Katie's Lebenswelt

Katie is a Caucasian female in her late fifties who lives in the same small town as the other co-researchers. We decide to conduct the interview at her house. We are on a familiar basis, and we sit for some time chatting about life over coffee. After an hour or so, we begin the interview. I ask Katie to describe for me her understanding or wellness or well-being. Katie begins by saying that she thinks:

> I would define wellness as being a balance in all aspects of a person's life – emotionally physically, spiritually, intellectually – which is different from mentally. Being able to be whole, being able to be genuine – knowing who and what you are in those aspects in being as congruent as possible with the rest of the Universe (in terms of personal safety).

She chuckles, then explains to me that it is important to her to "be authentic to be well, but it's not always safe." Katie confides that she feels that she has always been "an outlier – I just came out of the womb that way." She describes how being an outlier can "socially target you." Katie voices her experience of being "subjected to a lot of bullying" when she was a little kid. She feels that these experiences led her to wear "a lot of masks," so now, as an adult, she tries to consciously "not do that – or to be doing it consciously."

Katie tells me that she believes that wellness lives on many levels; "there's personal wellness, familial wellness, and communal wellness." She describes her belief that "the Universe as a whole is a healthy, functioning organism. On its own. It is a thing, I think that systems can be very well, I think that we live in a system that is very unwell." Katie adds that part of her personal struggle is continuously asking herself, "how do you live well when you're trying to live in the context of something that is pretty unhealthy?"

I ask Katie if she has anything she would like to add to wholeness or being genuine as a concept. She takes a breath as she tells me that she hates the "Army's 'Be All You Can Be' kind of bullshit thing – but I really like that concept." She voices that we "have that right, that it's our birthright to be all we can be." Katie uses a metaphor of a seed to describe how when we look at the seeds we do not know what they are going to be, that the "seed doesn't know what it's intended to be," and that "that part of wellness is being in an environment that supports that –nourishing." She describes the constraints of cultural norms, such as "girls having to wear pink" or "boys aren't allowed to cry" and how she has "always hated that." Katie espouses the idea that as "seeds in a nourishing environment," people would not have to live in the "conscription of the greater community – whether that be familial or societal." She uses the example of the "boxes that churches or religions that tend to keep people in - very blinded to aspects and options outside of the box." Katie adds that she is:

> Only trying to get outside of the box. Or the - I just want to go over there and see. So, that wholeness thing, that genuine-ness thing – not only to be able to do that but to . . . I think that wellness is being something that supports that, that

> isn't afraid of that. So much that I see is our society being scared to death of anything that is different. "Oh – it didn't come with instructions – don't touch it!"

We both laugh. I ask Katie if I can "have you tell me more about the congruency? Is it congruency of the aspects within a person?" She tells me that she can offer me a specific example. She describes a group process for a local organization that she belongs to, she comments on the accomplishment of this group for its group participation and cohesiveness. She tells me that the "State people are like – how do you do that? Well, we just do it. I know that how we do that - we eat, we provide lunch." Katie asks me if I am familiar with "group's forming, storming, norming, and performing processes." I tell her that I am. She explains that there was a lot of "storming initially. If we're going to be a group what's it going to look like? Under what rules are we going to function?" She continues to explain that by the end of this initial process it was decided, in some way that is a mystery to Katie, that to start their meetings they would "pray and say the Pledge of Allegiance." Katie voices her discomfort in saying the Pledge:

> I stand quietly, and be as respectful as I can, to use it as an opportunity to meditate on my feelings about our nation and asking people, requiring people to say those words – and what the intention of those words are and the meaning of all that.

She tells me that she has "always waited uncomfortably in the back of my brain – for somebody to challenge me on why I'm not saying that pledge," but that nobody "in that group has. None of our visitors ever have, none of the members ever have." Katie speculates aloud that she thinks it is because the other group members may be "scared of

what might come out of my mouth" about why she is " not joining them in this ritual that for whatever reason people seem to think that needed to happen on a regular basis." She declares that the "fact of the matter is – Pledge happens in [town]. It just seems to be a community norm." Katie tells me of her early years when she memorized all the words and did the Pledge "all through school," then in her adolescence around 16 or 17 years old, she stopped. She describes how she "was very violent and vehement about it – I would get in other people's faces when they were doing it and explain to them the wrongness of all that!" She chuckles as she tells me that "in my old age, I've quit fighting that." She concludes this experience with explaining how standing silently, and going "hhhhhhmmmmm" while the rest of this local group is saying the Pledge of Allegiance is part of "being congruent. It's being congruent with who and what I am. I'm not going to go through the motions of something that I don't even understand why you are doing it." Katie tells me that as she gets older, "the more and more frequently I am making choices like that in regards to congruence just to be true to who I am and what I believe in."

Katie describes for me some of the institutions she rejected in her youth, she includes "my nation," "religion," "organized business," and "politics." She explains further what she means by congruency,

> that is being able to understand that other people are very different, and that's okay. That doesn't make me wrong. And I don't have to get defensive about it. That's what I used to believe – that if I cant make you believe like me, one of us is right – somebody's gotta be wrong here! The older I get, the more I think – who knows? The older I get, the more I think that issue is moot.

Katie tells of how due to the "little boxes that people feel comfortable in; I frequently find myself way outside of people's comfort zones." She speaks about the struggle of "being a people pleaser, wanting to help people stay comfortable – but not wanting to be untrue to myself." She describes how she pushes herself to "interact" but not at the expense of "my own self-identity or my feelings. What's right or wrong or real or . . . goddamn that's struggle!" She lightens the moment with an easy laugh as she exclaims, "Who knew being a person was so hard?!"

Katie decides that, "it's a lot easier if you think you know what is right and what is wrong. It's much harder to be the skeptic! The questioning skeptic in the middle of the question." I interject in the natural pause of the conversation to observe aloud that she has "talked about the congruency between who you an the structures you are in," then I ask her if she can tell me about, "how you think a community affects a person, an individual's well-being?" She initially responds with telling me that "we are social beings" but that she had not always believed that. Katie spends some time discussing her experiences of feeling very "alienated," and how she never identified herself as a member of any social groups – including her family. She tells how she loved her family, "but I didn't understand them." Katie describes her "tender feelings and fierce loyalty" toward her family but that the "bond thing people described – mmmmmm – not happening for me."

She goes on to describe her experience outside of her family; "the visual image to me is always that of an outsider looking in observing people, always trying to figure out – how do you fit in?" She says that in "having that experience even with my own family

members it was compounded as I started functioning outside of the family, right from kindergarten on." Katie offers her portrayal of being acutely aware of her socialization:

> My observation, my experience growing up is of constantly being shoved into this form – like these little cookie-cutter little kids. My mom used to say all the time, "You're just a square peg and they're trying to fit you into a round hole! You have to get used to it – that's just the way of life!" I was very resistant - I don't wanna be shoved into that hole!

She illustrates her horror and dismay when she tells me about the Pink Floyd movie *The Wall* where they show kids marching into school "and coming out the end into little sausages - this is just the perfect embodiment of my experience." Katie informs me that she felt like "if I'm going to be experience of a human being among human beings, I'm going to have to allow this psychic soul rape thing to happen." She voices how she does not think it is right that she has to "somehow agree to a social contract of all this stuff." Katie tells me that eventually she found "*other people that felt the way I did.* A kind of renegade, outlaw, underground people to co-exist with. But even in the context of that subculture, there's like - rules." She emphasizes her desire to do things, "*I want to do not because you say I have to*." Katie expresses her concern of "just constantly feeling thwarted and having to fight, to be what I am, to have those values supported, and so I'm just constantly feeling like, 'Doesn't anybody else feel this way?'"

She admits that her life has been "characterized by a series of very fierce relationships with very few people who do feel the way I do, or get me, or believe me, or willing to put up with [me]." She spends some time describing more of her struggle to

find "a community that fits." Katie describes herself in her younger years as a "loner" who was "never pleased," spending large amounts of time "running off to find a different community, a different context, different group, different image of personhood." I affirm Katie by telling her my own desires for studying community initially were because I "so deeply desired the perfect place." Katie responds energetically:

> Shared values! And the fact of the matter, Joey, is that for the longest time how I explained all that to myself was that I obviously *am* an alien or something – and apparently that's okay. I don't get society and I don't have to, and I'm just a free agent. It's like we make all sorts of mental structures to try to figure things out, and being able to stay not crazy. Because the bottom line is if you don't fit, if you don't conform, if you can't function within the context of the greater – then you must be crazy.

Katie continues to explain how she "made the assumption that maybe some people need society, or most people need society, but I don't need society. I don't want much to do with society – the more I can be alone the better." She then explains how Alaska has made this allowance of a desire to be left alone is its "stock and trade." She claims that there is a norm of "I don't fit. Just leave me alone. I'll do my job and go home." Conversely, Katie then describes that she understands that "we *need* to be with our fellows. I know that we do. Because I see . . . very few people can be healthy and be entirely isolated." She continues to say that there is a "deep yearning to connect – and meaningfully! Not just, we both drive Subaru's. So - there's pseudo-community and it's really reinforced by our culture." Katie emphasizes that "we all live in a society that says

because we wear our hair like this – it makes us kindred spirits; or we all vote Republican that means that we're alike, we're in community." She offers a few more examples of pseudo-community.

Katie explains that, "coming into community I think is an act of volition. It isn't something that's just organic or spontaneously happens. I think it's a work. I think that love is not a *feeling*, I believe it's an act of volition." I continue to nod, and she continues telling me that community is "something that you do consciously as a matter of personal choice and then you get up the next day and you do it again." She also voices that, "learning how to come into community or how to create community for me a huge part of that process has been of laying down my weapons." Katie tells me that part of learning community has also been about "teaching myself that I am safe because I know how to keep myself safe, and that people disagree with me, I'm going to be okay with that and I'm not going to fight." She then references different ways that she could have handled not saying the Pledge of Allegiance within the local group she spoke of earlier, but that the current strategy was probably "the most healthy choice."

Katie ponders aloud that she thinks the local group has definitely reached the "performing" stage at times. She lists many activities they have contributed to in their local community. She also speaks to the cyclic nature of these group processes, and how in many ways, even "after all these years – we're still norming too." She suggests that, "because we're getting to know each other well enough that we're looking there and thinking maybe its okay to be different; mmaayyybbee we can learn to work together."

Katie tells me of the influence of a faith community on the group, and she felt that

they had been "really been paramount" in providing support for embracing difference. She says that it has been "very helpful to me, and I think that if not for their influence I don't know that I'd be hanging in there saying, 'Okay, we can do this.'" Katie claims that "good things are happening as a result of this" but she admits her reluctance to have the same people she meets with regularly come "sit down in my house for dinner." Katie tells me about using the weekly meeting as an opportunity for her to "check out my own wellness"; to see "whether or not I can be present" or if she is going to always question group members motives for what they are saying. Katie describes herself as "basically distrustful . . . I like to think otherwise – but . . ."

We take a break at this point. Katie graciously offers me another cup of coffee. After a while, I tell Katie about the second half of the interview. I ask her to describe for the best and worst periods of her life. The periods are to be at least two weeks in length, and she can begin in whichever order feels right to her. She begins with the worst.

Katie tells me of her middle school years, especially the summer between sixth and seventh grade. This is when, Katie says, "puberty happened and I was all of the sudden like a lightning rod." She explains how she "got teased a lot my whole life anyways" but that after developing large breasts, the teasing became much worse. Katie remembers her mom trying to advise her by saying that it was like "you have no skin; like you're naked, running around raw. Don't care what they say- just ignore them." Katie states that she "simply couldn't." She describes seventh grade as "the worst," eighth grade as "bad," and ninth grade is when she began "finding some kindred spirits." She confides that seventh and eighth grade, "felt to me like I had nobody."

Katie reveals her sense of loathing, how she hated "me, and I hated them." She articulates that this was when she "developed a really vicious mouth. My sole defense was just cut people- just lacerate them! Because I had no defense. I had no way of deflecting that." I nod when she describes how vicious kids are when "they find someone to taunt. I got teased a lot. And it didn't take much – I recognize that on my part. My whole life I was told I was too sensitive." She chuckles and states softly that she is "sensitive, my feelings are easily hurt." Katie reflects upon how her tough persona:

> Got a lot thicker; reckless, careless, indifferent, angry, mean – I was a mean thing – cuz I was just like being a celibate counselor; I wear glasses, I read too much, I was bookish, I had a head of ideas. I don't do the social thing, I don't do the flirty thing – all of the sudden I find out I'm a girl!

She describes the confusion of having the experience of being molested "and all that entails" and trying to discern between "what may or may not have been good natured teasing, or may or may not have been unwanted male sexual attention. I had nnnooo idea how to deal with that." We both laugh over a few sardonic remarks before Katie continues telling me about this period in her life. She spends some time talking about the two friends she had, and questioned their motivations for being her friend. Yet regardless of their "true motivations," Katie says she felt that "they helped me by saying, 'just ignore them.'" She describes one of the "goodnesses [sic] happing in my life then; I did a lot of reading. There was always a book between me and the rest of the world for those three years." Katie emphasizes that she read "phenomenal amounts, and learned *a lot!* I'm an independent learner – and I had two really good teachers during that period of

time, both of them balanced me and directed me intellectually." She concludes talking about this period remarking that if "I had known you could kill yourself . . . I probably would have killed myself. I just, somehow hadn't actually realized that you could yet."

Katie directs the conversation to another period in her life, a time in her adult years. She describes a period of alcohol and drug addiction, poverty, and severe co-dependency. She summarizes this period as:

> I was actively embracing the, "Die young and make a good looking corpse – what is your problem with what *I'm* doing?!" It wasn't denial – it was delusion – that this is okay. "Self-destruction is a perfectly sane response - thank you very much – to the insane world that I live in." And it was painful and god-awful, there was a lot about that period in my life that is extremely difficult. And yet! I certainly had more tools . . . and I had a better sense of my . . . I didn't feel so raw.

Katie declares that she "just wasn't as vulnerable"; she knew she "wasn't as stuck – I could vote with my feet." She was no longer that little kid having to go to school every day "whether I wanted to or not. Being told constantly that what I was experiencing was normal, and I should just *ignore it* - wondering who are those people who keep hurting me? Make them stop!"

Katie spends considerable time relating her experiences of when she "hit bottom." It's painful for me to listen to; I offer as much nonverbal and verbal support as I can while she recalls these memories. She is forthright; she offers many details. She summarizes this period and the relationship she was in as having:

> this tremendous sense of - despite the pain of that experience – the sense of "we will be okay together" And then when I recognized that there actually was no "we" really – at all – I was three years sober, I was going to school, I had a job, I had my recovery community. I was being obviously supported – it wasn't even all that painful – it was like, "oh, dear."

Katie laughs saying that it was painful, but that "the pain was really deferred or somehow sublimated in the context of that relationship. When it was revealed for not being a natural relationship but kind of a holding action between two wounded souls . . ." Katie moans an "eeehhhh" as she move her hands as if she is weighing something, she explains that she was asking herself, "What are we supposed to be doing now? Where am I going? I'm doing what?! Let me rethink this whole thing!"

At this conjecture, I ask Katie if there "is anything you would like to add about the support with the groups you were involved with while becoming sober – school, work, A.A.?" Katie explains to me a process of "complete ego deflation," a condition where "you are completely able to let go of any sense of who and what you are. I'm the empty void – okay we're going to reboot." Katie makes some button pressing noises, then continues to tell me that "we have a few systems that are pre-installed and that's what we're down to here." Katie reveals to me that a large "part of being supported by the Universe was – I had very clear job descriptions at that point. Isn't that why fascism is such an attractive idea?" She offers her reasoning as "it gives us a clear cut – well, do this and this and this and that's the end result and you don't have to worry about anything else or look anywhere else and – it was very helpful to me!"

Katie tells me of some changes that occurred in her home life with her daughter, and their ways of coping; she explains that "even the disruptions at home were not bad - because I had an understanding that there were support systems in place." She mentions a few of her support systems: "therapy," "classes on addiction and substance abuse," and "forming [relationships] at that point built on other people's recovery processes too." Katie explains how these helped her to reframe her experiences and encourage her to ask more questions regarding "plan B," available resources, and how she could get what she needed. She depicts her first few years of becoming sober as "rebirthing process – I was re-parenting myself – literally." She provides a metaphor of what her life was like before sobriety:

> You know pinball machines? I always think of my life before I got sober as like a pinball machine; drop the quarter in, the ball comes out - Choo! Choo! Choo! Lights are going off! Racking up a tremendous score! You're not going anywhere but down the hole. Then you pop back up! Okay! Let's do it again! That was good!

Katie relates to me several aspects of the "new experience of being in one place"; she tells of how she asked herself lots of questions that required her to reflect on what she wanted her life to look like, her beliefs, values, and roles. She remembers writing her roles down and putting them on the wall, "seeing if they fit– coming back, scratching them out – it literally was like being born again." Katie speaks of the discomfort in moving out of her "pretty small comfort zone." She describes current day experiences of being in a position of authority as, " just the weirdest experience; because – even when I

teach – my emotional expectation is always, [scoffs] ooohh! You don't belong here, you need to go home. You were not invited, we don't know how this happened." Katie explains her constant "struggle" in her "apparent functioning . . . . in a wider and wider arena." She admits that she "comes home exhausted" and that these kinds of social events are still "anxiety-provoking" for her. But Katie says she feels that she has the "wherewithal" to deal with it.

At this point, Katie and I decide to take a small break. We refresh our cups, and chat with other household guests. After a while, we come back to finish the last part of the interview. Katie begins to tell me about her best times. She claims that they were, "before I went to kindergarten, before I was exposed to the world outside of my family; like one of my earliest memories is watching my dad have DTs, and mom was at work." Katie recalls knowing that she needed to call her mom, and being about three years old. She admits that one would think that would be unhappy experience, but for her, it was okay.

Katie softens her tone and facial expression as she explains how, "my mother and my dad loved each other a lot. Every baby that came along, we adored. We were very poor, my dad drank, he gambled. There were issues." She laughs, and then whispers to me how much she adored her dad. Katie tells me how they "were mischief together! Anything I wanted to do, we'd do." She recalls accompanying her father on short haul runs, stopping for at a diner for "home-fries, bacon, and eggs sunny side up - with burnt onions and catsup all over them!" She remembers being allowed to "put quarters in the juke box, and if I wanted to play Tennessee Waltz fifteen, sixteen times - my dad is fine

with it!" She whispers again telling me that they, "always had so much fun together." Katie describes how he always told her how bright and strong she was. She explains that he "had this whole mythology that he'd built up about himself, that included me." Katie details several separate occasions of violent episodes at home, and then tells me how, "none of that was problematic to me. We loved each other." She further recalls a time of making fudge, sitting on the kitchen counter, watching her parents dance and listening to them sing.

She remembers being "so poor in that time of our life, that the lights got turned off" and recounts that owning a vehicle was a rare occasion. Katie laughs as she tells me that they "had food security issues – as I've learned to say in my adult social world .We were very poor." Katie proffers her perspective of these early childhood accounts:

> The love that we felt was real. I know that my mom and dad loved each other. The violence happened – it would erupt and it would stop. It was like waves of violence. His drinking - he was not a chronic, but an episodic alcoholic. It would come, devastate our family, then it would go. Those were the happiest times in my life – before I had discovered that all this is not how it's supposed to be.

Katie recalls happy memories of being "pulled into his lap" and being read whatever was available; she explains that she "can't remember a time when I didn't read." Katie grants an appreciation of her father doing his best to "explain to me this world that he didn't understand. I picked up a lot of like secondhand resentments from him." Katie describes a few of these, then recounts how "armed with that belief system" she stormed into kindergarten. Katie makes a gun-firing noise and then moans as she

recalls how strange an experience it was to find out that "other people don't believe that way."

Katie describes those years as "very, very sweet. And they are the basis of my happiness today. I think that the simple things that we enjoyed when I was a little kid – are the things I enjoy now." She reflects back on that time, telling me that "a lot of bad stuff happened." Katie says that she was sure that she "must have had some feelings toward it, but it was all easily shoved to the side in the larger context of the love I felt, the safety I felt." She concedes that it is "weird to think you felt safe in a family that." Katie explains that her father would sometimes "brutalize" her, but that she never felt that he "meant to harm me or anything." Katie says that the violence only happened when he was drunk; she tells me that she always thought of it as:

> Oh! The monster's here. Dad went out and the monster came back – be really quiet, don't upset the monster. Because he's crazy" And that had nothing to do with my dad, or my relationship with my father. I mean, I know that's what kids do, that's how we stay safe, and I also know that you can brutalize the hell out of kids and they'll still love you.

She goes on to describe various internal struggles she has with the ethics of some of the choices and constraints she has to confront at her job concerning children in homes being investigated by the State. Katie describes the darker side of State care with "kids so fragmentized in social services, and really endangered in foster care" that intervention is a difficult conundrum. She suddenly becomes very energetic stating that she believes, "shit happens. Shit happens. I would not be the person I am today with the strengths and

resiliencies I have today, if I had had this other kind of childhood." Katie goes on to explain how her parents "were teaching me constantly – my mother me how to endure. Holy cow can I endure. My dad taught me how to preserve, and also – both of them taught me the absolute joy of life!" She pauses just briefly before expounding this teaching; no matter how "weird it is, or shitty, or difficult, or problematic; there's joy and there's joy just being alive!"

Katie brings this back to wellness. She tells me how significant it is to "celebrate wellness - to celebrate the great accidental, ironic fact of our existence!" She further explains, "We're dirt that came to life somehow. Whooaaaahhh! Check that out! Why do we muddy it all up with all that other crap that just brings us unhappiness?" She declares how she believes that "attachment really is the root of all unhappiness. You know, even our bodies – we need to be less attached to, and more joyful about."

Katie voices her belief that it is "all temporary - don't get used to none of it – cuz it's temporary. And in the more recent past, my happiness is in being able to enjoy every minute, celebrate every minute. Be alive and actively participating!" She speaks of how this is a new skill, that for many years she was the "observer – or runner. I spent tremendous amounts of energy just trying to get away."

Katie continues, telling me that "being able to be aware of this great joy - it references back to being willing to accept the burden of the vision, and yeah! I'll carry that – this is good. Oh, I forgot this is my happiness, oh – here it is!" She expresses her appreciation for a friend of hers who has a personal motto of "if you ain't having a good time, take your toys and go the fuck home!" Katie expresses that her belief is asking why

"shouldn't I be having fun? I don't want to join you in your veil of tears! Oh – 'Bad! Bad! Bad! Horrible!' Yeah – it's bad ***and*** **it's as good as it gets!** And! It's wonderful." She posits the question of where do we go with that paradox? Katie suggests that you "can either like go shoot yourself in the head or you can just like celebrate. And so far, I choose to celebrate." She continues to describe her current position on joy:

> I can find celebration and joy in any moment, in any . . . in even the worst circumstances. That's one of the many gifts I received from my totally bizarre childhood. I can find the goodness – and that doesn't make me crazy, half a bubble off , a bad person – I laugh when people are going, "Oh, that's horrible!"

I laugh knowingly. In simpatico, Katie expresses that "laughter is the way the Creator allows us to deal with the pain and the indignity of life." She elaborates saying that life "is very undignified. There's no dignity on earth – being sitting up mud, getting scrunched down constantly, and making such horrible fools of ourselves."

Katie concludes the interview telling me that she is very "blessed!" She explains it further:

> I am so lucky! I get to eat, I get to sleep, I really like my partner, my kid's okay, and – with as weird as here is – it is the most rooted I've ever felt in a community. I've never felt – invested. I feel really invested in this community. I think push come to shove – this is a good place to be. I know people around here.

We mutually decide that the interview is at its natural conclusion. For a while longer, we discuss multiple realms of personal life experience, and have a good time laughing about it over more coffee. Eventually, the day grows short, and I must return home.

3.5 Yvonne's Lebenswelt

Yvonne is an Alaska Native woman in her late thirties. She resides in the same small town as the other interviewees. Yvonne and I were introduced by a mutual acquaintance about a week earlier to determine if Yvonne may have an interest in participating in this interview. After some brief introductions, and describing the topic of the interview, Yvonne was very excited to conduct the interview with me. On our scheduled day, I meet Yvonne at her work, as we determined this would be the place to best meet both of our scheduling demands. Even here, in an office work space, my hostess offers me tea. I spend some time setting the interview equipment, while Yvonne attends to a few work-related tasks. After about fifteen minutes, we review the Informed Consent form. Yvonne tells me that she understands and is comfortable with the process, so we begin the interview.

I ask Yvonne to describe for me her understanding of wellness or wellbeing. She responds that for her, it is her "mental, physical, and emotional parts of my life, to share that with others, and a positive outlook on life." She tells me that she is a "believer of when you're positive, positive is radiant in you; you draw others to positive-ness." She describes how she has lived in different communities and she observes how in her experience, "for some odd reason the positive-ness is harder to radiate out there; But once again, it depends on the group of people that you're with. So I tend to stay away from the negative and I concentrate on the positive, which in my life has so far been with children." I use Yvonne statement about children to ask her if she has a lot of relationships with children.

She reflects that since she comes from a large family, "it has always been that way with me. Yeah, children are just really important." I ask her what age group is she referring to when she says "children." She, initially tells me that it ranges from birth through adulthood (early twenties). But, then she pauses, and refines her statement; she decides that 10 through 20 are her favorite age groups because she thinks "you can make a really positive influence on them at that time in their lives." Yvonne tells me that she has witnessed it here at her current job "more than ever before," which is significant because she also reflects that she has had "a few jobs pertaining to children."

She goes on to describe to me how the impact of her interactions with these youth have carried on into the youths' adult years, and that she still has contact with them. Yvonne emphasizes how "positive" and "powerful" these connections are. She explains that she has recently moved back here, and in the last two years, "they've made comments to me within the last two years - where they say that what I have done has impacted their lives. I'm very satisfied with that." I affirm her with an enthusiastic head nod. Yvonne continues, she states that these connections come from "the being positive and having things for them to do. Just that simple."

She describes how these interactions have "changed my life – just from hearing those things." Yvonne contemplates that before hearing the youth's comments, she "never needed to know, or felt I didn't need to know, the impact I had on their lives." The unexpected gratitude for her past job performance by the youth, "makes me want to continue doing what I've been doing." I suggest how much of a blessing it must have

been to be acknowledged in this way; this encourages Yvonne to tell me a specific example of how a young man came up to her during a training for the job she has now, taps her on the shoulder, and says, "Are you Yvonne S?" She describes how he gave her a very big hug, and tells her, "Yvonne, you don't know the difference you've made in my life! I've been working since I left [her past employer]!" She describes how she was "crying I was so proud of him!" Yvonne tells how she thought she would have never seen him after he finished his program, and her shock when he told her that "his work ethics, his everything changed" because of her.

We are briefly interrupted from a few patrons needing assistance. When we reassemble for the interview I review aloud with Yvonne the original components she stated as part of wellness, including "staying positive." I ask her if there is anything else she would like to add . She explains to me that she is a "strong believer in the Creator – so I pray a lot." She qualifies this with a statement of how she is "not like 'Praise the Lord' this and that – but I try to treat people the way . . . I go to church, and I believe in treating people with kindness. That to me, probably one of the most important things." Yvonne speculates that this is likely due to what she "has been through personally – the *unkindness*!" She emphasizes that this is "always in the back of my mind, is to show kindness. You know – just be there for people."

Yvonne reflects on how she is:

> A great pretender when it comes to emotion. I mean, for a job like this, you can't bring in your grumpy mood, if something is in the back of your head – like your finances, I try hard to never to radiate that around the kids. So, that's why I say

> I'm a great pretender emotionally. And then, when I am having a rough day, I try to always explain, "This is my best day today." And so, I'm always trying to basically check myself. That to me, has a lot to do with my wellness. Because, personally, to stay in check mentally and emotionally, that's how I deal with my personal growth.

She emphasizes how she "likes to share. I like to share my time with helping others, especially – with the youth and the elders. Elders – I'll always bring them food, or something, you know, just an act of kindness always." I want clarify Yvonne's statements so far, so I ask her if what I hear her saying is accurate, that the "kind of self-evaluation, the keeping yourself in check; what you are keeping yourself in check about is the staying positive and putting others first?" She tells me that it is not "putting others first," but that for her well-being she needs to "wake up positive." She explains a bit more, she reflects that "basically, it starts with me – so if I wake up rotten, I'm going to be rotten. I try not to do that. I try to look at beautiful things – like look at the trees, check out the sunshine. Simple things." She confides that she "just thrive[s] on it. More than ever now." She illustrates her commitment to this practice:

> My mother used to tell me: "If you get up on the wrong side of bed, get back in bed, and get up on the other side." I pretty much live by that rule. It's a golden rule and I've passed it on to my kids.

Yvonne pauses for a few moments, then tells me that she likes to be "outdoors, just like chopping wood just the everyday living stuff is really important to me." She includes her love of reading; she says that another things she does daily is "to read a

positive quote – to read positive – or talk to someone positive – just to stay on the positive track!" Yvonne emphasizes how she "definitely tr[ies] to stay away from gossip and negative comments about others." However, she also observes that "for some reason, I found in life that since I've done that – there's *a lot I of gossip that comes back about me.* Where I don't know if I'm too happy or . . ." We both chuckle a bit. Yvonne tells me how her partner is "really pulling me through right there; he's like, 'So, what?! So what they say about you! It's not true, don't worry about it!' So, I'm kinda learning, as I'm growing older is to just let that negative stuff go."

Yvonne confides to me that she is "a half breed – I don't know if you know that or if that should matter – but it does matter to me because I've seen the way that in the Native community it is very negative." She says that "it can be really destructive, and I think that's a lot to do with suicide. I don't know if you hear much about the Native population suicide . . ." I tell her that I have, and she responds by telling me that she thinks that one of her goals in life is to try to figure "that out." Yvonne says that she wants to use some educational money she will be receiving to "benefit the problem that we have of suicide. I think that it has to do with lots of negative-ness towards each other. That's always on my back burner. Still can't touch out where I can help in that department." She recounts that she "went to college for two years when I was younger, started to have babies and stuff, that was going to be my major was Counseling but I've chosen to back off from that right now."

I share with Yvonne some of the information I had been reading about Alaska Native people and "intergenerational trauma." We both agree that we would like to meet

up at another time to talk about this in more depth. She tells me how when she was in her hometown, she would:

> always go to elders, when I lived in my home town, I don't know that much elders around here – but, when I was in my hometown, I'd listen to their stories about the change they went through – and it was pretty drastic. I think it tore a lot of our people up emotionally. They just pretty much shut down. And then from them shutting down, I think its carried on from generation to generation. A lot of our people, especially the men, well – a lot of cultures - the Native men don't talk. Because they weren't talked to. I don't know – this my own personal theory, but it's always in the back of my mind.

Yvonne continues to speak to me about the connection she sees between the high suicide rates and a lack of "positive-ness":

> The only thing I can pinpoint, the only thing that bothers me, and that's why I would never do it to another person – and that is never talk to them or say negative things about them. It is rampant! Rampant around our communities. People who grew up together would literally walk by and not say hi. That's just the biggest sin to me ever – and I think it's happened way too much to people. And I think they just give up – their souls are like just . . . you know, bleak.

She asks me if I have ever heard of Alkali Lake and the New Directions program, I tell her that I have not. She spends some time talking to me about the history, benefits, and outreach the program provides. She describes how being a part of this program changed her life; Yvonne tells me that it "it just hurts my heart because its becoming weaker and

weaker. Everybody's 'We gotta stop suicide! We gotta stop suicide!' but then they go out there and walk by people without even saying hi. You know what I mean?" I affirm her, and she continues to say that "you can't - you just gotta treat people like you'd want to be treated, and I think this is our greatest downfall."

I tell Yvonne that I think she has really "hit upon something there, is that it's often in the little, everyday things. Not some big . . . " and she very loudly responds with a "YEAH!" She emphasizes the value of "just a smile." Yvonne tells about another life lesson her mother taught her:

> Like my mom used to say, "Whenever you go to the store – everyone you see – you say hi to! Even if you have a beef with them, you say hi to them." And I'm like [grumbles loudly] " Um, hi."

We both chuckle at her dramatization. She emphasizes that it is important to acknowledge others in this way because "you'll never know if you'll ever see them again. So, I live by those rules. I believe deep down in the bottom of my heart – that's what's going wrong. I think we need to bring the positive activities." Yvonne declares that she thinks, "there should be a class where there are everyday living, happy things you have to do to yourself and others!" I enthusiastically agree with her. She tells me that she thinks it is like "a seed. That's why I treat these children the way I do. Because I want to plant just one little seed!" Yvonne confesses that this seed is planted by "just by saying, 'Hi! How are you today? What's going on? How's school?' You know –things like that. That simple conversation just makes a person's day." She pauses for a few moments and tells me that she is going to cry. I do my best to verbally and nonverbally be supportive. She

decides that she does not need a break, so I ask her if there is anything she would like to add about how a community affects a person's well-being, since we had already discussed many examples of this in answering what well-being is.

Yvonne suggests that although the local town has some support groups active in the community, she cannot stress enough "it needs to go on *everyday.* People need to be treated good *everyday*! Not like – even on a job, yeah, and I think that sometimes lacks in this community." She expresses her surprise at how many people say hello to her whenever she walks into a building. Yvonne then reflects that since I have "been asking her," she thinks, "it's because I try to be positive when I say hi to everyone. You would be surprised! I'm surprised my phones not ringing because like – people *need positive.*" She ponders ways that she can continue to "bring this positive to these youth" as her current position in working with young people is about to end.

Yvonne stresses that among the Elders there is " a lot of loneliness" and she feels that "due to a lack of funding," it is "difficult to get something going on." She suggests that the school should have "wellness trainings." She feels fortunate to have "gone to a lot of trainings." Yvonne strongly emphasizes that it is she who is "*going to* those trainings, and those trainings need to *come to* our community." She provides an example of a community-wide training that came to a town she used to live in, and how it changed that community for "six or seven months!" Yvonne claims that the concepts of how to be positive within a community "spread like wildfire because I've seen it, I've witnessed it. It is my strong belief that it would be really beneficial." She explains that in her hometown various organizations required their employees to attend these kinds of

workshops – and – how the employers funded it because they can see the "benefits it has for everyone - to radiate out into the community. It has had a great effect on my hometown. It's beautiful; I can't brag on it enough."

We each have finished our tea, and refill our cups. Yvonne tells me of how she finds it "really discouraging is when I walk into an office and nobody says hi." She reflects for a moment, then exclaims how we need to look at ourselves; that it is a shame how "we all go into our jobs and forget who we're working for – and that's for the people."

I observe that it seemed to me that many of the people who are visibly active in the local community have strong religious points of view. I ask Yvonne if she thinks this affects "how or who they may approach, or who is allowed to be in their positive circle? Whereas maybe in your hometown more people belong to a similar group or perhaps it's more spiritual than religious?" Yvonne immediately responds with an emphatic, "yeah!." She tells me that her hometown had three main churches:

> Catholic, Episcopalian, and the Bible Church. Each family is in different churches. But it doesn't really matter down there – as long as its not pushed on them. And as long as the religion is not - you know, one congregation is not like, "Oh, they're sinners!" That's just a no-no down there. A lot of that has a big part of turn people off – and they don't go and join an activity that doesn't pertain to their religion! I think that's what backs a lot of people off!

Yvonne observes that she "doesn't see that much at home." She does confide, however, that locally there are "certain groups of people" who "are with these different activities,

they also go to our Native potlatches when somebody passes away. So, they mingle, and they don't act like *they're better*." However, Yvonne still feels affected by the exclusion she feels by other groups, she explains that she does "try to attend events, but, some I'm not comfortable with. Just due to the fact that - I'm not thinking, 'Oh, they're not in my group!' – it's more or less the feeling of being judged."

I ask her if when she lived out of state, if she lived in a large urban area, she says that she did, it was "about the size of Fairbanks." I ask her how her experiences there compared to her experiences in her hometown. She begins describing the experience by telling me that she had never lived out of the state before, but she was "at the bottom of my life. Picked up my life basically. I didn't have an ounce of self-confidence. I wanted to just displace myself and run away! So I just work out there from morning till night." Yvonne observes that she did not "associate much, but I did go to church. They were just great. The difference – they were willing to give! give! give! Like – food - fresh sea food. And that – WOW!" She recalls how this is "how our culture used to be! And I don't see that often anymore. Like giving to Elders – I make it a point! If I get one piece of moose meat, I will bring one to an Elder. It's the way I was raised." Yvonne declares that she thinks a lot of cultures "are forgetting that. Not only the Native culture – but all cultures – is to share. And when you do - they're floored now. And that's really sad. Because it should be happening everyday. I see that." She recounts a time when she recruited some young people to make cookies for some Elders:

> The kids wrote down the names of the Elders who were just right here in this area – and we dropped them off – and these people just - they ***bloomed!*** I can't use a

better word. They were, "Oh thank you! Somebody gave us something!" These kids still want to do it! We've done a few little things for the Elders. It's amazing, when you give. I think that would benefit the community to do more – to pull people together.

Yvonne observes how one of the things wrong with society these days is that "there's no more simple things – like sharing, teaching, things like how to change a bike tire – anything. I think that's where the Elders or older people could help out – to bring people back together because it's rare." She thinks aloud how "things are dying - I think a lot of that has to do with computers. I use them myself but I still at least one day of the month to try to do something good, to give back." Yvonne shares how this is something that is "really lacking in society today - we don't pass on and share enough – with how it used to be."

She tells me that she "really hopes I made a difference with the kids around here." Yvonne spends some time telling me of recollection of how she helped some youth while in Washington by introducing them to a National Park they lived next to. She suspects that it was giving the children an opportunity to connect with Nature that helped them. Yvonne re-emphasizes that it is these small, simple things that keep "a community connected."

We reflect together on the health of having nuclear families, Yvonne says that she does "not think it was a good idea." And I agree with her. I offer an example of how many parents demand their youth who turn 18 years of age to be "automatically kicked out of the house" – no matter what the circumstance, "for their own good." Yvonne

emphatically agrees, she says that we should "let them bloom first!" She says that she "feels kind of bad – time flies so fast and you can only do so much!"

Yvonne suggests that the community should have certain days where everybody offers up their particular skills or resources to help whoever needs it, she gives the example of fixing a bike tire or chopping wood or teaching kids how to set up rabbit snares. She also observes that there are a lot of people who are willing "to give – but they're never asked. Nobody ever asks – so they never give. So – there needs to be a little switch in that somehow! I still cant figure out how."

Yvonne reflects, again, on how the job expectations of being "at a desk" means that she "can't ever share what I could have really shared with these kids. And it's sad to me because I think there really should be activities like that – getting them outside." At this point a patron knocks on the door, and Yvonne must attend to some work duties. We take about a fifteen minute break.

When we come back and resume the interview Yvonne tells me that she is glad we are doing this interview because "it's opening my eyes. I do know certain people in this community - from having to do surveys with this job – on what they would love to be involved! They'd love to do things – especially the Elders." She spends some time discussing different people's skills and what they could offer to the local community. Yvonne also explains how many of these people see the surveys as pointless:

> I do surveys for [an organization], and where it goes from there – I don't know. I feel like that's where I'd like to continue working is by making these things happen. Because there's people out there who want to share but its like – it's

> "You're to do the paperwork – prove to the government that we're doing our jobs." And then – it's just –[snaps fingers] gone. It's a crime I think. It doesn't make me look good doing a survey that nothing happens. And, a few times, the people that I asked for these surveys are like, "Why? People always ask us, nothing happens." So, in turn, they get turned off. Why would they want to keep being interviewed?

She summarizes her thoughts on the subject telling me that she is going to be honest; all these organizations like "the Councils, the governments, the organizations, can talk till they're blue in the face, but they don't stand behind their word. And it's very discouraging – very discouraging." She comes to the conclusion that there are "monies out there for things to happen, but it's - once you get behind a desk you don't do anything anymore." I suggest that the issue is further complicated by the fact that the person you may be working with in such organizations are not personally involved with your community. The phone rings, and Yvonne takes the call. When she hangs up, she explains how a friends of hers was recently elected to the Native Council Board. She then describes the Native people's frustration with the Council:

> Very much people - Native people - are not happy with the Native Council here because it's more or less for them and them only – for them and their family only – and people are frustrated because - speaking for myself (which I always try to do) – but they're very frustrated with this as a community of their actions on not distributing out what they should be distributing out for our community. It's really sad, it's a crime. I think that's where a lot of the frustration and a lot of the

> alcoholism comes from. Sometimes, they're going from morning till night and I see a lot of that around here. It's really sad.

Yvonne says that she is "afraid to say it just from being a person from outside of the community – but being a Native I see it. That there's no place for them to go; and there should be – always." She suggests that the community should have a recruiter telling people about all kinds of different programs and funding available. Yvonne observes that this kind of advertising happened in her hometown, and compared to the local community who does not have these same practices she sees that "there's a big difference, I see there's a big gap and there's a lot of anger from that. And in turn, people give up. I don't think it's only [the] Native community." She reflects upon why she may be the way she is, she decides that she thinks it has "a lot to do with family and the way you're treated." She says that she would like to be apart of a study to look at different communities and see what they're doing "to make positive changes; to make things happen." Yvonne thinks that this may "make their people feel proud of who they are. In every culture. I know there are studies – but they're not shared." She says that it would be good to know what other communities are doing so that the local community could say, "hey! Let's do that too!"

She discusses how people spend so much time making money that they have no time for their relationships. Yvonne tells me how blessed she feels that her job is working with children, but that this means "from 9 to 5 – you're stuck. I would have loved to have gotten out there with the Elders, for them to teach out youth." She emphasizes that relationships are important. She recounts her activities within the community, such as

helping to cook at community dinners. She describes the ambiguity of her wants and needs:

> More or less I would like to have more of a relationship with the community. Now that you brought it, I like that word, "relationship" because I do oftentimes feel lonely and isolated. But – for my well-being, right now in my life, I want to be more or less isolated with children. But it's still important to be out in the community – to show that you do care. I choose to know what's going on in the community.

She illustrates her point about community participation with an example of how, in recent years, she does not see the Elder van transporting Elders to and from community events that she feels confident they would attend, if they "had transportation" or an explicit "invitation." She observes that maybe there is no volunteer available to drive the van, then reflects that she knows "there is a reason. Little things like that – all comes into play in a community. So, yeah – relationships – it's got a lot to do with being out there."

We come to a natural lull in the conversation. I decide to ask Yvonne to describe the best and worst periods in her life. I inform her that she can begin with whichever one feels most comfortable to her. She begins with the best times, "to be on a positive note."

Yvonne explains how this year is the best year of her life. She tells me that part of it is her job, part of is "a lot of hours in the community," and most significantly for her that she has a "partner that is so understanding. He's older than I am, very supportive." Yvonne explains that he supports her in her activities as a "social butterfly!" She debates

aloud why it is this year and not the year that she "had my kids"; she decides that it is because back then, she was not "the complete person that I am now."

She describes her life a year before:

> My youngest daughter chose to go to her grandmother due to the fact that she wanted to know her grandmother; I'm always busy – I wasn't always there for her – a year ago. I was really depressed; I was going through a abusive relationship. And I was drinking a lot.

I ask her how long she has been in her current relationship, and she tells me for one year, and that "that's why this is the *best* year of my life." She tells of how they had been friends for years prior, "And we've always had that good, friendly talk – never hardly seeing each other, having our own lives. Both went through divorces." She pauses for a moment then says that they, "both feel like we're going to be with each other for the rest of our days." Yvonne explains that they are "really comfortable together. My daughter's really comfortable with him, after seeing me in an abusive relationship." She explains further that at this point in her daughter's life, she needs "that male role model."

Yvonne describes some additional characteristics of her partner, and that he inspires her to take care of herself. She tells me that he helped her realize that although she is frequently busy, it is often "for others," and that it would be good for her to do a few more things for herself. Yvonne informs me of what a typical day is like in their relationship:

> So, basically I'm finding more of myself in my relationship through my communication with him, with being busy, with making future plans, with

> always, always doing *something everyday together!* Always waking up, having cup of coffee together, always having some type of communication. And going to bed happy. Meaning, like sharing our day together. It sounds real simple – like a simple life – but, it's the most comfortable life I've ever lived since I was a child. And that's saying a lot. I can breathe. I'm happy. I smile.

She exclaims that her life is *so completely different* than her life a year and half ago. She describes several key points in past abusive relationships, including threats to kill her, physical violence, and substance abuse. Yvonne then explains to me that her and her current partner have had their rough moments, she feels that these have been mostly due to her "having a hard time trusting." She becomes more emotional as she tells me that he helps her "to believe . . . I am going to cry."

I ask Yvonne if she would like a break, and she says yes. After a few minutes of talking, she brightens, and calls her partner, telling him that this interview reminds her of how much she loves him and how happy she really is.

When Yvonne feels comfortable to move on, she tells me about her childhood and about the three abusive relationships. Once more, I feel deeply for my co-researcher as she describes these ordeals. I find myself admiring her resilience. We shared more tea and talk for a long time. As the interview came to a close, each of us speak of wanting to meet again, this time with the possibility of friendship.

3.6 Paul's Lebenswelt

Paul was recommended as a possible interview candidate through a mutual friend of ours. I was excited by this possibility, as recruiting men to participate in this research

had been a more difficult exercise than I had originally anticipated. The next time we met, Paul and I discussed the possibility of an interview, and he accepted my invitation. Paul is a Caucasian male in his early fifties, also living in our shared small town.

As has become customary, I am offered coffee. We chat for a while, review the Informed Consent form, and after reviewing the interview questions, I hand Paul a copy per his request. Instead of me asking the interview questions, Paul simply reviews the written questions and answers them in the order that makes the most sense for him. He begins by explaining his concept of wellness. Paul supposes that ideally:

> It figures into a physical wellness or well-being. Some of that includes what a person eats, their choice of work. Their family life, then on a larger scale, the community they belong to; whether the community is connected to my work or not.

He tells me that in his "desire to be physically fit" did not really begin until high school. Paul reflects that his interest was likely spurned by "seeing old people who couldn't get around." He remembers saying to himself that when he got old he "didn't want to be – you know, in a wheelchair, or dawdling along with a cane, or being all bent-over-broke-up."

Paul tells me that one area he knew he had a problem with was that he "didn't know how to socialize. And especially, when I suppose, when it came to socializing with women – I had no concept of how to do that!" He speculates that this may have been due to his home life. He explains that he was not involved "in a lot of social activities that my peers were doing, because there'd be too much consequences at home; if I went out in

the evening the chores were still to be done when I got home." Paul describes how it "put a big damper on wanting to do any after school activities or anything like that. When all my friends were getting involved in different clubs and whatever, I said, 'No, I can't do that.'" He confesses at this point that he is unsure of "how important" this may have been, though he continues to say that he it may have been one of the reasons he "ended up going into the Marine Corps - I think as a way of getting away from home." He reflects that he feels that if he had not joined the Marine Corps, "I would have somehow got stuck staying at home, kind of like my brother did. He stayed at our home, oh – until he got married in his mid-thirties."

Paul reviews the interview questions, and adds that wellness has emotional and spiritual aspects too; he concludes that "you can be physically fit and a mental wreck. I think I've had a fair amount of problems dealing with mental well-being over the years; I think it get tangles up with some of the spiritual aspects." Paul shares with me that he believes that his confusion "comes in with the spiritual part because of religious training or whatever I got growing up; kind of confused the whole picture." Paul says that he has suffered "bouts of depression" which he describes as:

> Over the years, and sometimes I've wondered if it was just Seasonal Affective Disorder type stuff, cuz it does seem to affect me more in the winter time than in the summer time. Sometimes there's a sense of hopelessness, sometimes I think it's just a situational thing – and I've had that several times over the period of my life where it's gotten pretty bleak. And trying to figure out how to get out of the holes is pretty difficult.

Paul brings this back to illustrate how the "idea or ideal of wellness or well-being has to incorporate the mental aspects. It allows me to function in society is the way I look at it." He confesses that a lot of his time here in Alaska has been "spent trying to figure out how to be comfortable around people." Paul shares that he felt his experience of living in a small town in Alaska is where he first "became an individual seen as an individual, and not seen as someone belonging to something or someone else. It was very unusual for me, because I was the youngest in the family." He explains that he "always felt like I was shuttled off to the back, or infantilized in some ways by my mom, of course, she always called me the baby. I didn't especially like that. Especially when I was bigger than she was." We both chuckle.

Paul states that he feels that well-being is also, "just trying to be accepted, or being considered . . . being seen as being competent, and allowed to do things." He reflects that he thinks that a lot of the difficulties in his life have been dealing with how he sees "myself being competent and how other people see myself as being competent. There's a lot of ways I might overcompensate in that area, and yet still not see myself as being competent." Paul offers several examples in his life that illustrates his struggle with feeling "competent." One example of this is:

> When I was in another small town, while ended becoming a carpenter – I started out knowing nothing and picked it up as I went along; different people teaching me. I remember after four or five years, people started asking me if I would do carpentry work for them; I didn't feel comfortable doing that, even though I knew how to do the work, but up to that point I had mostly been doing stuff under

> someone else's instruction. Which was much easier than having to go look at a job and then plan out like the materials, and how to do the job, and then estimate the price and not get screwed. I didn't feel competent in that area [emphasis on estimating price], so I think back on it and I think, "Oh – wise move." [sarcastic] I went from 13.00 dollar an hour carpentry type work to 6.00 dollar an hour job.

After another example of Paul's struggle with being seen as competent versus how he feels about his competency in a given area, he begins speaking about other dimensions of wellness. He reviews what he has verbalized about what constitutes wellness, and adds that these aspects (the physical and mental), are, "is part of my self concept; how I fit in my community, how I fit in with other people. Spiritual is still something that is being defined. I think that is how I see me fitting into the Big Picture." Paul directs a question to himself of whether or not he will "leave anything behind" and decides that he does not know. He says that he has been to enough funerals to listen to others' eulogies and wonder, "what is someone is going to say about me when I die? Are they just going to dig the hole and kick the dirt over me? I don't know." He makes a comparison between himself and his partner, noting that "if she dies, somebody's showing up to her funeral, so to speak."

Paul speaks of how he does not mind "being different, I guess in some ways. I don't mind bucking the trend." He tells me the story of how he would ride his bike to high school regardless of the season, and was old enough to have obtained his driver's license. He states that his portion on this was that "I don't want a driver's license because they're putting a pipeline in Alaska; they're ruining the state," so I rode my bike as my

private protest against the pipeline." Paul tells me of another time he "took an unusual position" during this same time period:

> We were to do an analysis of what it'd take for us to live once we got outta high school – so like a budget. The teacher said – you know, we'll do this and we'll present it to the class. And I went and said, "I can live on six dollars a month – because that's what a bag of pinto beans cost. And I'm going to go out and shoot rabbits and stuff like that! I'll live in the national forest." And everybody else was like, "Well, I'll need a 1,000 dollars a month to pay for an apartment, or TV dinners" and all this other stuff, and I was like, "Screw that, I don't need that!" And they just kind of looked at me like I was an alien. And I was okay with it.

I nod my head to affirm him. He speculates that this may have been where "I also had some of my social ostracism, I'm not sure. But I did have my friends at that time but none of them were female." Paul remarks that he is unsure if he answered question one. I respond by saying:

> What I've heard you say about the mental aspect has had a lot of interpersonal, relational skills involved. I'm curious as to if you find more traditionally defined mental activity as part of wellness. So for example: reflection, analysis . . . for some people they may consider education or schooling or . . . the ability to you know – read Shakespeare or something. Does that resonate with you? Would you say it's connected to the interpersonal?

Paul reflects on this and tell me that he does not think it relates to the interpersonal that for him he has always felt comfortable being alone, as long as he had "access to books,"

even if he was, "in solitary confinement, then there'd be actually no problem. Or even the capability of writing or drawing. Anything to be able to express myself in that sense." He jokes with me a bit by saying that he does not know this for sure, since he has never actually tested this theory. We both laugh. I encouraged him not to.

There is a natural pause in the conversation, so I ask Paul if he wants to say anything more about the "religious versus the spiritual dichotomy that you mentioned?" He tells me that he has "gone through several different brands of religion over the years." He describes his Lutheran upbringing and the non-denominational services in the Marine Corps – of which he did not appreciate the "taking of everything but Catholicism and Judaism and threw it in a blender and threw it out at you." When he left the military, he lived with a family member for some time. Paul reflects that they were not "particularly active in church. We weren't . . . the community was mostly Catholic, and in being Protestant in that community almost ostracized us I think." He explains that there were "only - two or three other people were knew who were Protestant within the community we belonged to – and it just – felt different. It was like, [big sigh] you're almost shunned – put it that way." I offer a sympathetic affirmation.

Paul tells me that when he moved to Alaska he joined a Baptist church for two or three years. He describes his experience:

> Eventually I found it to be a very painful experience and I had to leave. The whole Holy Roller, fire and brimstone thing – wound up making a huge amount of arguments in my head, and the arguments would just – I would go to church listen to the sermons, listen to the songs, listen to people do their personal

> witnessing, and I'd go home and ruminate on it, and it'd just be huge battles going on in my head – to the point where I was actually suicidal.

I verbally expressed my concern and my shock. He tells me of a friend he had that was an "ostracized Baptist preacher, and I went and talked to him about it. I said, 'I'm going absolutely crazy!' and he's, 'I had the same feeling there.'" He tells me of how this friend supported him in trying to decide whether to leave the church or not. Paul explains that he did decide to leave the church but was afraid of the repercussions; he says that they "were so – you can't leave type thing – you're part of the family, and what kind of surprised me once I quit – I'm not even sure if I got visited by anyone – so I don't know." He tells me that it was at this point that he started getting involved in a 12 step program; an Alcoholics Anonymous group. Paul describes his reassurance "that you could come up with your own concept of God – you didn't have to depend on some religion's idea of what God is. So I kinda ran with that for - well, I guess till the present." He assures me that he has been "church-free for almost twenty years!" He recalls that there was a ten year period when he attended a Presbyterian church while in Alaska. Paul says that he was on the Church Board for a while, did some "fill-in reaching and stuff like that- which I didn't find comfortable. I know I have some problems with – I guess – the public preaching of dogma." He explains this further; he says that there are "certain confines where if you're in an organized religion, you have to keep your ideas within those confines. And it was not an area of comfort for me."

Paul further develops his understanding of the spiritual; he thinks that:

> the biggest way that spirituality falls in, is a sense of bring out either God's concept of what my life is supposed to be like, bring it into actuality; and I think that is probably the hardest thing to do, because there are so many influences on a person that tend to get in the way.

He describes two movies that speak to his understanding of this – a Japanese movie that in translation means 'to live', and Zorba the Greek. Paul insists that he is much more like Zorba's protégé in that he is "all rigid and tied up. There's nothing that necessarily physically ties me up – but I think it's oftentimes all these different influences I've had all my life - that confine me, and how do you break out of that?" He notes that Zorba the Greek is one of the more appealing movies for being "alive, or having that sense of openness and wonder. And just carefree-ness." Paul speculates that the times he feels most alive is when he "bucks the trend and get[s]out of 'normality'. I think this is why [his partner] says that the animals have been beneficial to me because its stepping out of present day norms." He recalls that this is why doing rigorous forms of outdoor living or adventure has been beneficial to him; he felt like, "I could do anything after that." Paul concludes his talk about the spiritual saying that, "things like that – I think enter into what I call the spiritual. When you can push the boundaries, and get out of the box we get put in."

There is a natural pause in the conversation. I tell Paul that I think this is a great segue into how community affects well-being, and I observe aloud that through our conversation thus far, that he would agree that our community's have a great influence "as to the boxes we feel put into." He offers me an affirmative "mmhhhmm." Paul then

proceeds to tell me that he has a hard time being comfortable with people. He tries aloud "to figure out the reason" why. Paul begins by talking about his experience in elementary school, in which he felt "comfortable most of the time." He describes his unsettledness upon entering middle school:

> I think my first year or two of junior high, I was still with my peers, and going around to different teaches kind of threw me for a loop. I remember in eighth grade, they mixed everybody up. So – all of the sudden I was with different kids, that I hadn't gone to school with all my life. I didn't have a good sense of – I wound up making friends – but I wasn't in the same group that I was most of the time. Usually I was like at the top of the class, and there's a certain amount of status in a certain sense, and all of the sudden, I was the out kid. And the people I ended up gravitating to were the sort of like the freaks and geeks. I didn't have a good sense of how that happened, but I'm no longer part of the cool kids anymore. It was a very perplexing year, eighth grade.

Paul confesses that he used to run away from home. He says that he used to "always see that as being pathological. There was something wrong with me that I was always running away from home." He reflects that he is beginning to see that he was "actually doing something *good!* The surroundings weren't good for me, and I was trying to get away from the surroundings. Some of that was my home life and some of that was my school." Paul says that these were his two main communities at that period in his life. He pauses for a few moments.

Paul spends some time talking to me about his experiences growing up as a farm kid versus his experiences of going to school with city kids. He tells me that there was simply no easy way "for them to just come over. We lived ten miles out of the city." He remembers that during the summer months he would hardly see the kids he went to school with at all. Paul states that he thinks:

> We were okay with that for the most part. But it did make for totally different dynamics between the few kids that rode the country bus and the majority of kids that were the city kids. Where you play basketball all summer, or get on some Little League team, or something like that.

He also notes that the kids he went to church with were yet another set of kids, and the kids he participated in 4-H were yet one more set of kids who lived even further out in the country. Paul comments on how there was "just a lot of awkwardness socially." He changes the direction of the conversation. Paul speaks of how the "strongest rules are the rules that are unspoken." He spends some time discussing some norms of being a farm kid; he illustrates the expectation of cooperation and interdependence when performing farming chores, such as milking, with some of his own experiences. Paul explains that as the youths grew into young adults, the dynamics changed:

> My older brother ended up getting a job. So, then he pretty much got relieved of doing chores, so the chores fell to me and my dad. My dad got less and less organized when it came to being on schedule for the milking and so, sometimes, we'd still be doing milking at 2 or 3 in the morning! And so this would end up

affecting my homework too, so I wound up not taking anything that was hard, so I wouldn't have as much homework in high school.

He informs me that his response to this shift in dynamics was to eventually get a job himself, at that point he was released from the understood obligation of cooperative chores.

Paul tells me that during this same period in his life, his mother developed a "horrible hoarding disorder! We had a huge house and in about five years time, she managed to fill it." He demarcates an approximation of how much room they had to live in within the room that we are in, saying that "the rest would have been piled to the ceiling!" He describes how the kitchen was the only place in the house that "anybody could come into the house." Paul declares that this is why "we couldn't have friends over during high school years." He reflects that he is unsure of what his friends thought of the excuses to keep them out of the house, he further reflects that he did not think that "they could understand that necessarily." Paul describes the ostracism they experienced with other family members due to his mother's disorder as well. He tells me that it was not until many years later that family members were made aware of the situation, all they had known before was that they were no longer invited over for important holiday dinners. Paul also explores how his sister was disowned from his immediate family by his parents "partially because she smoked – and – I think they didn't initially approve of her husband."

He confesses that when he looks back on his life, he can see how "going into the Marine Corps took me from being in this crazy family community to one that actually

made more sense! Yet my experience of being in the Marine Corps was traumatic." Paul spends some time talking about other options that may have been a better fit for his personality, and what his life was like immediately after leaving the military. He describes why he thinks living in Alaska is interesting; he is outside of his "sphere of family. Just trying to figure out who you fit in with – wherever you're living ends up being an interesting thing." Paul delineates several different levels of closeness he felt with people in Alaska: "there were people I knew, and people I might have been friends with. Only one person I felt that we were pretty good friends. It was such that he'd invite me over for dinner on a weekly basis." He confesses that he has " a difficult time making friends." Paul speculates that it takes time to begin to feel comfortable in a place; he suspects that "some of that comes about just because eventually people start recognizing you."

Paul reviews the interview questions, and brings himself back to contemplate what else he might add to how community affects well-being. He declares that he thinks "we have a hard time, doing community. One thing that I grew up with was the whole farming neighbors helping farming neighbors." He offers me an example of how his dad would help his neighbors bale their hay, and the neighbors in turn would help his family "put up our hay." Paul describes a culture shift in the Midwest:

> Either when things became more mechanized or when people started getting out of livestock and didn't need some of these different feed inputs like hay or straw for bedding – then this need to depend on one another went away.

He explains that this "is probably one of the biggest diminishments felt in the Midwest. It's like once that was lost – it's been impossible getting it back. And that's something I've noticed every place that I've lived." Paul says that even in the Marine Corps "trying to get people to work together was one of the hardest things. And when you got people to work together – it was great! Something happened!" I chuckle, and he explains how "threats were not a good way to get people to work together." This time I laugh and affirm his conclusion. Paul reasons that oftentimes employing a person with "a certain amount of charisma, that could get people to gel, would help a lot" in getting people to work together.

Paul pauses, then tells me that he thinks that what "we have nowadays isn't something that works very well. When it comes to community being positive factor – personal well-being -we're too separated and isolated – in a HUGE way." He speculates that it may be "the idea of being competitive – that's something that drives us apart." Paul says that he knows it is different here due to the fact that:

> It is basically half White and half Native. And its diversity in that sense is perhaps the most extreme that I've lived in, and yet in a lot of ways we get along pretty good. Yet there are definitely distinctions between the Native community and the non-Native community here. A fair amount of animosity still exists.

I ask Paul if the animosity is on one side or the other or if it is both sides. He responds telling me that it really depends on who it is. Paul tells me that although his partner "is White, she is the most Native person" he knows; she feels "real comfortable in the Native traditions or whatever. I suppose that helps lubricate things for us – yet in a *huge* way

we're not real intimately involved with anybody that I know." He says that there is "some kind of separating or dividing that goes on." Paul explains that when the community comes together "for community functions, we all socialize fairly well I think. I guess from a social aspect, we're still more White people, than Native people in how we are in this community."

He further speculates that in his own understanding of a sense of community he believes that "traditional, tribal type probably works better. There's less sense of personal belonging and more a sense of community sharing." He pauses for a few moments then concludes, "modern post-industrial society is the best way for humans to be in a community. There's too much isolation and it's built in to the structure." We spend a few minutes discussing issues of ownership and the power struggles that arise from the current definition in the community.

There is a long pause, so I ask Paul if there is anything else he would like to add. He concludes this part of the interview telling me that there is:

> Always the potential for a community to ostracizing an individual or a family. And I think it actually happens quite a bit. And when that happens – speaking both from my own personal experience and from what I've read – being ostracized or banished is perhaps one of the most . . . disabling thing that can happen to an individual or family. There has to be a need for a feeling of belonging.

As has become customary, I suggest we break for a few minutes before we begin the second half of the interview. We refill our coffee cups, and after a short while we

resume the interview. Paul begins by explaining to me that his best and worst times were closely intertwined, the best usually following the worst. He begins by describing that he was considered a good Marine, repeatedly receiving good marks on his evaluations. He tells me that he became "obsessed with a few things" and "depressed" his last year with "conflicting desires" due to his "limited ability to change directions." He goes on to describe a scenario in which through a series of unpredictable events, someone stole his assigned duty "pistol and robbed a store with it in another state." Paul describes how the consequences of this pistol theft rippled into being ostracized by other NCO's, stripped of his position on the rifle team, denied the ability to carry a weapon, and having to go to trial; he states that he goes from "being this highly revered person to being this shitbird in like, one day." At this point he tells me that there were a few things that did start tog o his way, for one, it got him out of his depression. I asked him if it was being angry. He chuckles, and informs me that "thinking back on it - it seems a bit crazy." He entails how while awaiting trial, he ended up working the scullery duty as a form of punishment. Paul stresses that two weeks later the Mess Sergeant moved him to the Mess Deck, and within a few days of this duty, he was promoted to a supervisor over two Corporals due to his good work while on Mess Duty. Paul relates that he did however, still have this trial "hanging over him." Although, he tells me that he was grateful that the trial did mean that he did not have to go on some potentially unpleasant deployments. Paul says that by September his supervisors wanted to deploy him, even though he was supposed to be getting out of the military in October. He says that they decided that his trial did not seem to be going anywhere so they were going to send him off on a deployment to Panama.

Paul decides that this turned out "to be pretty good too." He describes how he was in a mortar squad, under Army command, and that there is always some rivalry between the Army and the Marine Corps.

He tells me of how there was an obstacle course, purported to be the Army's toughest one, and though "normally I couldn't do obstacle courses – at all – and I ended up doing this one as good or better than anyone else." He offers me another example of excelling at another purported "toughest night time navigation course – without GPS." Paul concludes that this turned out to be a "really positive training experience." He explains how he comes back from deployment to begin to check out, and after everything that had happened because of this pending trial, the trial ended up never materializing. The military decided it would cost too much to bring all of the witnesses back. Paul concludes that this was one of the worst periods of his life.

Next, Paul describes in considerable detail his adventure of crashing his plane, and the proceeding four-year trial of attempting to get it out of the Brooks Range. He spends a lot of time telling the story of the last two weeks of the airplane rescue. I am enthralled with Paul's account of this adventure. He concludes his experience with telling me that "this was one of my peak experiences following a huge tragedy."

We spend another twenty minutes exchanging each of our experiences of comparing living, both temporarily and permanently, in urbanized, semi-rural (highway access), and remote rural areas. Paul emphasizes how much the state changes when "you get off the roads." He also spends some time speaking on the difference of the quality of being in the wilderness with mechanized or motorized vehicles compared to a canoe or

on foot. We conclude the interview, with Paul telling me that "wilderness is a must for well-being."

Also, as is customary with the co-researchers before Paul, we spend extra time talking and having more coffee after the interview. Eventually, afternoon draws to a natural close, and w say our good-byes.

Chapter 4: Analysis

As is traditional in a phenomenological study, I transcribed the interviews, reviewed my notes taken during the interviews, and wrote narrative forms of these interviews; I was fully immersed in the data. From within this immersion, two major themes with several subthemes emerged from across all six of my interviews: (a) the definition of well-being and (b) the process of discovering how to be well. My co-researchers were diligent in their effort to discuss with me their concepts of well-being, and were forthright in telling their narratives of how their eudaimonic, as well as, arduous experiences intricately laced their identity with what wellness means to them. As a part of this study, I too, experienced an identity and wellness interplay. Most importantly, I realized that research is, at its best, fully relevant to our lived experiences. The emergent themes all surprised me, even through a literature review and an immersion in the data – as I did not quite believe that what people lived would equate to some form of affirmation of other research findings.

4.1 What is Well-Being?

The first task of each co-researcher was to describe his or her understanding of wellness or well-being. Their second task was to describe how they thought communities affected personal well-being. In all six interviews, the co-researchers offered examples of wellness in relational terms. In other words, when they defined well-being, when they offered examples of what well-being would look like, they inevitably described community practices and environments – whether it was an office, a neighborhood, a

school, or a family. At times, co-researchers described "community" as a larger cultural perspective, such as being ethnically American or Alaskan Native. Surprisingly, these responses are not unusual; a person's understanding of how he or she feels and thinks about life is Diener et al.'s (2002) foundational definition of well-being. Moreover, how a person comes to understand what life 'should be like' emerges from interaction (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934) and a person's quality of life depends significantly upon the quality of their interactions (Stewart et al., 2006).

Four subthemes emerged from the capta: (a) the definition of wellness (what it is), *The Map to Joy,* (b) what well-being would look like in practice (the ideal), *Unity,* (c) the tools for implementation, *The Tools and Skills Necessary for Well-Being* and (d) tools for destroying well-being, *Why Are Rats Eating My Face?* There is some overlap between the second and third subthemes, yet they remain separate due to the nuance of emphasis placed by the co-researchers between implementation by individuals and what ideal communities would be doing as a whole to support their constituents. This theme is suggestive of a traveler looking at their map (definition), envisioning what the trip may be like (the ideal), packing tools needed for the expedition, and warning signs of what to be wary of along one's travels.

4.1.1 The Map to Joy. There were several emergent definitions of what wellness or well-being is. Generally, co-researchers initially provided constituents of well-being; as the interview progressed, they would offer a definition at about the half-way mark. All of the interviewees emphasized that well-being consists of multiple levels of experience (i.e., collective, individual) as well as included various qualitative spheres (i.e., spiritual,

mental, emotional, and physical). These trends are consistent with current literature also expressing 'components' (Ayyash-Abdo & Alamuddin, 2007; Jacob et al., 2008; Kim & Kim, 2009) as well as 'contextualizing' well-being with phenomenological experience (Bernstein et al., 2006; Healy et al., 2007; Moller et al., 2007).

Although co-researcher's definitions varied semantically, they were qualitatively similar. The definitive criterion of well-being, how one knew they achieved wellness, was when one "experienced joy." This makes sense, as well-being is most frequently conceptualized as how happy a person is in their life; joy, is a state of heightened happiness. Secondary, yet still of great import were: the ability and opportunity to be "authentic," to be oneself, and to be "supported and nourished," to feel safe in being oneself within their community, also referred to having "a sense of belonging." Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, and Ilardi (1997) report that authenticity and autonomy are associated with being a "more fully functioning person" (p. 1391); they emphasize the "importance of experiential autonomy for well-being" (p. 1391). A feeling of belonging to a local community or community of practice influences people's sense of identity; hence, influencing a person's sense of how well or frequently joy or authenticity may be safely experienced or expressed.

The opportunity and ability to experience joy, authenticity, and belonging comprised the defining characteristics of the wellness map. The remaining discussion details the co-researchers narratives of how individuals and communities accomplish these achievements or fail in their attempts in this collective and individual enterprise.

4.1.1.2 It's All Related. All the interviewees discussed how a person's everyday actions influenced the affordances and constraints of well-being; they also voiced how the social milieu affected the individual's ability and opportunity to experience well-being (joy, authenticity, and belonging). I was shocked at the co-researchers' emphasis on this theme; it was a true revelation. The co-researchers stated that well-being is a result of our everyday actions, both as individuals and as communities-in-practice. As Yvonne articulated, "we have a lot of community gatherings and stuff. But like I said, I can't stress enough, it needs to go on *every day.* People need to be treated good *every day*!"

Peter succinctly points out that, "the collective of individuals defines the community in a deep way, but the *community defines their identities*." All of the co-researchers in describing the best and worst periods of their lives spoke of how the quality of those interactions affected how they saw themselves then and today. Stewart et al. (2006) explain that identity is created, perpetuated, and changed through every day interactions; like the interactions that contribute to identity's creation, identity itself is collaborative, continuous, and complex. Oftentimes, they referred to this as a search, struggle, or synchronicity of their wellness of fit to the surrounding community-of-practice.

Co-researchers also emphasized the multi-dimensionality of wellness through a sense of balance between multiple spheres of experience: spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical. Paul and Katie suggest how an imbalance within these spheres of

experience can affect well-being through an example that one could be intellectually well but not mentally well. Katie explains:

> Well, there's just a brain that works – that accurately perceived information and interprets it. As opposed to curiosity and accumulation of knowledge and being able to not only assimilate knowledge, but synthesize it. I know a lot of people who are intellectually smart but not mentally well.

These comprising spheres of experience were sometimes refined into elements such as when Peter articulated that wellness was, "wholeness, harmony, and beauty." Avy's trinity consisted of "interpersonal skills for relating well, spiritual capacities, and the ability to create in the physical world." However, all of the co-researchers agreed that well-being was not one dimensional – one could not have wellness with just one developed dimension. Yurkovich and Lattergrass' (2008) study revealed that their 44 interviewees also understood wellness as multi-dimensional, encompassing a sense of balance and harmony within "spiritual, cognitive, emotional, and physical domains" (p. 448).

4.1.1.3 Community is an Act of Volition, Just Like Love. It was agreed upon by all of the co-researchers that a person must *do* wellness, as well as, have a supportive emotional and physical environment in which to practice well-being. This is further enforced by Austin and Avy's definition of well-being as "the ability to experience joy," and Avy further explains that "well-being is a skill." As each of the co-researchers expressed experiencing joy and suffering within the context of their relational experiences, this reflects the necessity for having opportunities to *learn and practice*

healthy ways of interacting, including addressing areas such as interpersonal connection, conflict, and group process. We all experience interactions continuously; the quality of our interactions determines our quality of life (Anderson, 2004; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Hsieh, 2004; Stewart et al., 2006).

Yvonne spoke adamantly of our "everyday positive-ness," reflecting an understanding that 'we are, what we do'; that engaging in common social courtesies helps support a community (Stewart et al., 2006). She also focused heavily on her "*choice* to know what is going on in the community. I *choos*e to know." Katie emphasized this when she explained, "like love, community is an act of personal volition. You go to bed at night, and you get up the next day to do it all over again." These examples illustrate the continuous and collaborative aspects of maintaining interpersonal relationships.

4.1.1.4 We're Sitting Up Mud, How Cool is That? The emotional and spiritual aspects were difficult to untangle, as were enacted values versus religion. Jacob et al., (2008) and Goldstein (2007) suggest that although transcendence is an important factor for well-being, their work shows that self-reported well-being measures were highest when people were engaged in social activities that reflect personal values (e.g., recycling, volunteering) or if participants engaged in a daily reflection practice. Being familiar with many of my co-researchers, it surprised me how the *non-religious* persons were just as adamant, and yet often more flexible, about how well-being is created in a person's life than the religious persons. This emotional/spiritual sphere was a major component of co-researchers' experiences and understandings of well-being. The sphere of spirituality appeared to be linked both to a qualitative feeling as well as to engaging in some element

of what it means to be (i.e., purpose, responsibility) and what one is or should be becoming (i.e., actions define who were are; enacting values and ethics).

Often, what qualified as spiritual to the co-researchers was similar, if not identical, to the definition or implementation of being or becoming well. Three of the co-researchers identified with a particular religious community, two of these three regularly participated in their faith community's events. These two co-researchers (within an organized religion) spoke of these experiences within the context of their religion – their religious beliefs providing the impetus for why one would do what they do, and prescribed guidelines as to how to do these endeavors. The other four interviewees spoke of the same experiences (values, ethics, speculations, or practicalities) within the context of the implementation for creating wellness in their own lives and in the lives of others. All of the co-researchers spoke of this emotional/spiritual sphere as a connection with something greater than oneself, a purpose for living, a responsibility for one's (in)actions, and expressing values such as sharing, kindness, and connection with others. How a person experiences spirituality, as opposed to emotion, is an impossible task to qualify or quantify; all of the labels used to define the experience a person may be feeling are contextually-bound, determined by the intersubjective intersecting of cultural, relational, experiential selves. In addition, cognitive autonomy does not allow for us to know exactly what is experienced *within* each unique individual, as outsiders, we are only privy to what a person *expresses.* Thankfully, interpersonal connection is established through *acts* of the very values that the co-researchers articulated – sharing, kindness, and

reaching out to another leading to emotional connection which McMillan and Chavis (1986) say are the "definitive character of a true community" (p. 14).

Another emotional/spiritual aspect for defining well-being is a prerequisite, or at least parallel to experiencing joy and being authentic, is as Peter says, "a sense of belonging." This sense of belonging was described most commonly in terms of what Austin called "security and safety" or as Katie remarked "a supportive, nourishing environment." McMillan and Chavis (1986) support the co-researchers' capta. McMillan and Chavis suggest that numerous factors build and reinforce one another in creating an emotional connection within a community: (a) a sense of belonging, (b) a willingness to volunteer and participate within the community, (c) sharing " symbols" (e.g., a religion, common community activities), (d) honor/humiliation (the rewards or punishments within a community), (e) the frequency of interaction, (f) the quality of interaction, and (g) the sense of a spiritual bond. The majority of these components were mentioned explicitly in the co-researcher's narratives.

4.1.1.5 The Physical World. Another subtheme defining well-being was that of the physical world. This took on several different variations. On one hand, co-researchers spoke of the importance of the physical maintenance of one's body and one's environment: exercise and nutrition, mundane chores such as chopping wood or weeding a garden and the awareness and knowledge of the natural world (ecology). On the other hand, many of the co-researchers put education and environmental factors and systems (social) in this sphere of experience as well.

Our physical environment is a major component in influencing our physical well-being. The ability to have adequate shelter, nutritious food, and clean drinking water has long been a basic human need. Our geographical location greatly affects communal norms, customs, and expectations, both as bodies acclimate and as behaviors become reinforced through overlapping interaction. For example, a person from Alaska may appear to be ill-prepared for the summer heat of Arizona through a lack of local understanding of appropriate clothing. Likewise, Alaskans may balk at a person who does not wear 'appropriate' winter gear as the weather turns. Though these are simple examples, they can mean the difference between physically surviving high desert heat or alpine cold, as well as, behaving in ways that support or cut off the social bonds that also help us survive in our human world.

In addition to a relationship with the natural world, all of the co-researchers voiced that relational support was also part of the environment. Avy summarized this well, when she said that part of wellness was being, "in a place where you don't have to fear what might happen next, or fear for your well-being." All of the co-researchers were frank and forthcoming about experiences where fear was within their emotional or physical environments. These experiences included "emotional terrorism" (Avy), alcoholism, physical and sexual abuse in childhood, ostracism, discrimination, and other forms of social (and emotional) disconnection in adulthood.

When elements that are inherent in our need for emotional connection are missing, or are routinely threatened or manipulated, the psycho-social consequences can be severe. Isolation in its many forms leads to a lack of participation, a lack of

participation leads to the inability to create cohesion, a lack of cohesion leads to a lack of individual satisfaction – all of which lead to group inefficiency (Acock & Demo, 1994; Young, Wood, Phillips, & Pedersen, 2007). A person is influenced by the interactions occurring regardless of if the relating styles are supportive or disconfirming. When a person is regularly interacting with ineffective groups, these are the relational patterns that are enacted in new groups – especially when this group constitutes the core of the person's social environment. We see this most strongly with children in their interactions with their family of origin; how the children interact within other groups often reflects how they are interacting at home (Acock & Demo, 1994). All interactions influence a person, but repeated past interactions affect a person's perception and expectation as to how new interactions will play out.

Co-researcher's sensitivities to the consequences of having systemic obstacles created within their families of origin and surrounding communities often gave the impetus for co-researchers to voice various criticisms of social infrastructures that block a myriad of individual abilities and opportunities for well-being. It was personally and professionally affirming for me to hear this. This conversational theme mainly included an equitable distribution and access to material goods such as food and wealth. Helliwell (2002) reports that "an economy with a more equal distribution of income will achieve a higher average of well-being, for any given level of average per capita incomes" (p. 25). It is notable that the theme here is not the amount of material wealth – but *how it is shared.*

Most of the co-researchers experienced a period in their lives of material poverty due to systemic reasons such as the Savings & Loan economic crash, lack of access to education or employment, or having education or skills in areas that communities did not employ or pay citizens to do (parenting, gardening, volunteering). A person is socially disconfirmed for not receiving money for something they do, versus being confirmed when they are paid (abiding by current societal norms).

Moller et al. (2007) address the socio-political and socio-cultural history and infrastructures affecting wellness. Their participants had been subjected to several devastating wars with accompanying poverty and various levels of social disintegration. The findings from this study, parallel the current study's co-researchers' personal experience and recollection of larger social practices and events heavily influencing their wellness. These life experiences lent ardor to the expression in which co-researchers articulated their ideas and ideals about what constituted community wellness.

Reflecting their scholarly peers, other researchers have certainly noticed how inequity and infrastructure influences personal and communal well-being. Social constructs such as education, economics, government and other forms of infrastructure are just as real as an avalanche or an ocean. Much of the social indicator research studies the effects of these larger institutions and the affect they have on individual and communal well-being; these variables include a large variety of choices, such as income, governance, health care, education, and social capital (ABS, 2002; Healy et al., 2007; Kim & Kim, 2009; Putnam, 1995).

4.1.2 The Ideal: Unity. The most common response to describing what well-being meant was to envision; to say, "Ideally, it would be . . ." All of the co-researchers acknowledged that much had to change in order for persons to currently live in a healthy society, a healthy community – though emphasis differed on the balance of responsibility between individuals and the communities themselves. Many of the co-researchers admitted that they do not know what unity (a "thriving, healthy community") would truly look like; they were making "educated guesses." Envisioning has been established to be a main component in problem-solving, especially for groups (Young et al., 2007). The practice of visualizing, feeling, and discussing "what could be" give participants an opportunity to be better equipped to begin putting resources toward creating the change they seek. It provides a safe relational space to ponder new norms and roles, discover resources, define issues, and to potentially come up with solutions.

Austin and Peter spent significant amounts of time voicing the importance of working with others in "good faith," establishing "high levels of public trust," and the acceptance of diversity while sharing common values. Building trust is an integral part of functioning with other people – whether interpersonally or internationally (Stewart et al., 2006). Trust is a major component to group life, though different levels of trust are required depending upon the goal or reason for the group, i.e., a friendship may require higher levels of trust than a task group where the emphasis in the interaction shifts to goal accomplishment more so than interpersonal support. As Young et al. (2007) point out, people do not have to like one another to complete a task, but they must trust that each will complete the expected responsibilities.

Austin shared that her faith community recently released a message that spoke of three prerequisites for adults who are actively seeking to build community at the neighborhood level, "rectitude of conduct, elimination of prejudice, and a high sense of justice." This phrase summarized nicely the emphasis of self and communal reflection, congruence between self and community, and embracing or celebrating diversity within and outside of the local community that all of the interviewees articulated. As suggested by McMillan and Chavis (1986) shared symbols in the form of communal activities bring community members together. Co-researchers reflected the *social need* to not only create but participate in local holidays, community dinners, prayer circles (from all faiths), music jams, and reaching out to more (systemically) reclusive members such as those with handicaps, addictions, or the elderly.

Most co-researchers agreed that individuals needed to focus on activities that enabled joy, rather than focusing on diversion, or self-interested happiness. Joy, being the ideal, appeared to qualitatively differ from happiness in its depth and purity; one could be joyful (encompassing happiness) but happiness was not deep enough to encompass joy. Ideally, as voiced by Austin, we would all experience "life as a prayer . . . *infused* with joy." This was expressed, among most of the co-researchers, as the ultimate goal or culmination of experience that lead to well-being. These insights are at the heart of Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia; a person leading a life such that there is an accumulation of autogenic activities, full of opportunities to deepen one's understanding of human nature, and "the exercise of vital powers along lines of excellence, in a life affording them scope" (Wills, 2009).

4.1.3 The Tools and Skills Necessary for Well-Being. Lastly, in defining well-being, the co-researchers all offered tools and skills necessary to create a social milieu and internal environment whereby, as Yvonne said, individuals could feel "safe to bloom." The majority of co-researchers brought forth a tool they called "consultation." Consultation occurs between spouses, friends, families, and communities.

Co-researchers voiced supporting skills congruent to consultation such as: forgiveness, humility, and the acceptance and celebration of diversity. Both Peter and Austin emphasized the ability to find common ground. These are the articulated tools and skills interviewees suggest using in paving the way for well-being. As such, Young et al. (2007) emphasize the importance of rhetorical sensitivity when interacting with others, as Stewart et al. (2006) remind us that if we want to improve our interpersonal relationships each of us must address others with appropriate levels of addressing others' uniquely *human* qualities. These skills include "giving and receiving uniqueness, unmeasurability, responsiveness, reflectiveness, and addressability" (p. 57). These practices would offer self and other a safe space to encourage authenticity, promote honor rather than humiliation, and support a strong sense of emotional connection (McMillan & Clavis, 1986).

4.1.4 Why Are The Rats Eating My Face? Just as the co-researchers had tools and skills for building community, building roads to well-being, so too, did they express tools or actions that destroy community, burning bridges to wellness. If joy is the co-researchers' definitive touchstone of well-being, isolation is their definitive touchstone for a lack of wellness. Interviewees experienced and witnessed enforced isolation by

other community members through the practice of various forms of shunning and ostracism. For one co-researcher their ostracism was due to living in a community with a large homogenous religious membership, with their family being in the minority religious affiliation. Another co-researcher described an incidence of isolation when confronted with a significance difference in values when brought in to testify for a friend in another country. Two other co-researchers experienced gossip and judgments (prejudice and discrimination) made about them due to simply being "too poor" or "of the wrong color."

Addressing diversity and difference is difficult, often even for people who have good intentions. This issue comes back to the interplay between identity, perception, and interpretation. Throughout an individual's experience, each of us comes to know ourselves and the world in a particular way – an interpretive culmination of all of our past and present interactions with our selves, others, and our environments. Often assumptions are created and enacted before there is an opportunity for that interaction's unique quality to emerge. There are contexts where this is appropriate, highly skilled persons have years of experience knowing what will happen next (i.e., a carpenter knows that using a particular tool on a particular wood normally has a particular effect). Social customs and normalcies are built around these same assumptions. However, because these interactions and experiences work for one person or one community does not necessarily mean that those same practices will work well in another context (Beamer & Varner, 2001). Continuing with the carpenter example, if this person told a friend to use the carpenter's favorite tool for a sewing project or teaching children how to do math, the likelihood of the tool working well drops considerably – the context has changed. Though perhaps

seemingly silly, the mentioned example is the equivalent to how people project assumptions of how the world can and *should* work onto interactions of all kinds. The lesson here is to question assumptions (Young et al., 2007). All of the co-researchers observed another way that individuals experienced isolation: when persons are hiding because they do not feel safe to be themselves; or, as Paul and Austin agreed when people do not feel able, "to address deep anguish" due to "low levels of public trust." Interviewees noticed that when isolation is not addressed it frequently becomes a familial or relational norm of distrust sprouting into "intergenerational trauma" as suggested by Austin and Yvonne, "numbness" voiced by Peter and Austin, or "abuse" mentioned by four of the co-researchers. Two co-researchers described abuse as "a breech of trust and authority." In Austin's metaphor of good compost versus sewage, she reminds us that one "can't just go pooping and peeing anywhere you want." Co-researchers voiced some level of suffering due to a lack of social support in both their childhood and in their adulthood. All of the interviewees were sensitive to the realities of individuals and families within their community who do not regularly receive affirmation of emotional connection from their local communities.

When the individual is ignored as an essential, unique constituent of the social, if the social is ignored as object and subject to (and context for) the individual, and when the synergistic qualities of relating, of living as an individual in a social context is overlooked, persons and communities alike become limited in their capacity to address their contributing actions and roles in *their own, as well, as one another's well-being.*

This journey of becoming oneself, of experiencing joy, of struggling to find purpose in life is littered with knowing that individuals experience the dark side relating.

4.2 The Struggle in the Search

The first four themes described the map of wellness, the envisioning of the journey, the tools or skills a traveler would need to be successful on a journey to well-being, and the activities that lead one away from well-being. This last theme describes the journey itself. This journey is able to occur only within a human world, for it is a uniquely human journey. With the map defined and tools in hand, now the *experience* of the travel begins.

Stewart et al. (2006) remind us that humans live in worlds of meaning; just as worlds of meaning are conjointly co-constructed in interaction, so are identities. The interplay of relational, co-cultural, and experiential spheres of interaction offer a unique self at any given moment (Richey & Brown, 2007); in other words, we change as the relational landscape changes. Like Mead (1934) posits, our co-researchers reflected that they are who they are due to the relationships in which they engage.

It is also within these relationships that one comes to know what well-being or wellness is. All of the co-researchers described periods of their life of learning how to fit in and the events in their lives surrounding this issue made the travel joyful or painful. Most of the interviewees spoke of three distinct periods in their life: childhood (under 11 – 12 years old), middle school years (12 – 14), and adulthood (beyond high school). This theme is experiential; it describes co-researchers' actual journeys interacting with various spheres of well-being.

4.2.1 Your Dad Scares Me. Only one of the interviewees claimed childhood to be a place of their greatest joy. Interestingly, the above exception took place in her early childhood, "before I was exposed to others outside of the family." In other words, before abrupt and incontrovertible identity negotiation is required. This co-researcher described the pain of entering kindergarten and realizing how different her family was when compared to the other students. Other co-researchers also spoke of their realizations that not everybody "did it this way" but not until slightly older years. For some, this realization was a confirmation that they were not alone, already feeling unsupported at home with emotional or physical abuse. Others struggled with ideals from church compared to what they experienced at home. A few of the co-researchers already felt isolated, turning more inward, and toward activities that felt safe.

These responses are not unusual, even for adults. Again, the world each of us comes to know as *normal* is potentially challenged each time an interaction occurs. The notion of normalcy is challenged more frequently as a person moves further away from routine patterns of interaction – including *who* and *how* one interacts.

A common reflection for many of the co-researchers was how they did not question their family life or community life until around 10 – 12 years of age. They may have been uncomfortable or understood that somehow things did not seem right, but the questioning stage appears to begin for most of our interviewees in the middle school years.

4.2.2 Now I Had Irrevocable Proof – I Was a Female! The Horror! All but one co-researcher expressed feelings of struggling with their socialization by their middle

school years (11 – 14 years of age). Several of these youth were beaten, bullied, and teased mercilessly not only by school peers, but by family members, teachers, or neighbors as well. It was here, in the beginning of the middle school years that many of the co-researchers remember asking themselves, "How can I fit in?" With the on-coming of puberty, the physical changes as well as the emotional ones, only added to the awkwardness and angst of struggling to figure out how one fit into the world. Frequently feeling overwrought with feelings of confusion, isolation, dread, worthlessness, or depression this period was quoted by most of the co-researchers as being the most painful. One interviewee questioned her "connection to the human race."

Three of the four female interviewees expressed that they were sexually molested or otherwise sexually violated in their youth (sometimes at this age, and sometimes at younger ages). The overt physical development of these youths often incited both the budding sexual interest from peers, and the more culturally contextualized *sexual gaze* from adults (Lorber, 1994). This includes a deeper understanding of what it means to be a female in our current society. These meanings are constructed through interactions with the surrounding communities of practice, such as school, family, and even through media consumption; which are all socialized products.

The male youths experienced conflicts more associated with achievement or status among peers and between father figures in their lives. If physical abuse was part of the familial norm, this was *not* a period of reconciliation, but of reinforcement through physical dominance of the father's higher status. Regardless of if abuse existed at home

or not, the males felt an increased pressure to perform well. All of the co-researchers felt the increased pressure to perform in ways more acceptable in an increasingly adult world.

This period of time in a person's life is when youth are learning and critiquing social rules and roles that are being observed, as well as, experienced. Past interactions, relational patterns within major social group memberships are being questioned as the youth enact them in different social contexts and receive different responses than from before. The increase of social awareness adds ambiguity and uncertainty, requiring an intra- and inter-relational flexibility and resilience as the young person undergoes larger expansions of identity negotiation such as being exposed to more and more difference or being required to fulfill more expectations (Acock & Demo, 1994). Youths who have had social support that encouraged authenticity and a sense of belonging (i.e., where emotional connection is strong), are more strongly supported in their identity journey.

However, even with great social support, when one falls and bangs a knee, the injury still hurts. All of the co-researchers described events in their childhood and young teenage years as being the most "raw." Suffering with a sense of powerlessness to change circumstances (or even know that they could be different), and a lack resources to affect how others treated them, these were frequently described as the most challenging events in the interviewee's lives. Most of the co-researchers believed that painful events in adulthood still hurt; however, they had more tools and resources to confront or deal with both the pain and the situations. As a result, "less painful" events in childhood still felt "more raw" than similar or even more tragic events as an adult. By adulthood, persons generally have a deep understanding of their co-cultural and relational strengths and

weaknesses as individuals, and have come to a place in life where they have developed relational patterns that are more comfortable for them. This may be knowing one's limits of enduring public contact or which interactional contexts are difficult, as well as, with what groups (or other persons individually) to interact with who provide a space of comfort or support within shared interactions.

4.2.3 Creating a Fortress of Well-Being. As adults, events that encouraged the feeling of "being seen" or "being heard" as a unique and worthwhile self offered co-researchers strength and esteem. Co-researchers most frequently commented on this when they were within committed relationships with a life partner or spouse. Yvonne claimed this year as "being the best year of my life" due to "having a supportive partner and a good connection with my kids." Austin related that she understands the benefit of, "having a supportive spouse . . . even at home, in your marriage – there needs to be courtesy, respect, and love . . . . a sanctuary to be yourself." Avy offered the ideal partnership to be understood as, "a fortress of well-being." This speaks directly to Stewart et al.'s (2006) adage that one's quality of communication is in direct ratio to one's quality of life. As has been seen throughout all of these themes, the ability and opportunity to experience joy, to be authentic, and to feel like one belongs in the relational environment in which they live affects every aspect of how persons view themselves and in turn, how they interact with others. Co-researchers statements regarding wellness being intricately involved with our everyday actions, manifest most strongly here in this theme since interactions between committed romantic partners usually comprise a significant amount of one's daily interaction.

In a similar vein, several co-researchers speak of "being known" within their communities as offering comfort to belonging in a way in which they do not have to "prove themselves." This has been noted by McMillan and Chavis (1986) as a threshold between individual investment and the contact hypothesis whereby the willingness to participate within a group increases the likelihood of becoming closer to those within the group.

Lastly, there was much discussion among the co-researchers of the comfort in what Katie voiced as "clear job descriptions" offered in certain communities-of-practice. Interviewees recognized these expectations to be offered in organizations and larger rule-sets such as those found in organized religion, legal structures, business, as well as, in certain roles such as being a student or cashier. Our roles play an important part in constructing our identity. Our roles often inform the affordances and constraints of our interactions with others lending cultural, institutional, and personal expectations to our communication, and ultimately, our identity (Putman & Stohl, 1990).

The unambiguous purpose and clear expectations offered an opportunity to simply 'do the job' often with little to no struggle with congruency between authenticity and social expectation. Young et al., (2007) discuss at length the propriety in having clear role and interactional expectations while working in a group. These clear expectations allow potential individual differences to be set aside to accomplish a goal, and reduce ambiguity through creating boundaries that define the type of relating participants are expected to perform. In organizational (institutions) situations, these expectations are

often centered on roles. Thus often limiting the scope of the interactions involved in overlapping tasks.

Although impersonal relating is legitimate and appropriate in many contexts, it rarely feeds an individual's sense of authenticity or joy for long; the confines of the limited relational space can suffocate autonomy and deeply confine a person's opportunity for unique expression. Many of the co-researchers spoke of these confines; Katie voiced her disdain of feeling put in a "box", and of the discomfort of feeling like she was being made into a cookie-cutter" person. Austin and Peter articulated their concern over how the constraints of norms, roles, and authorities can lead to "legalistic" or "absolutist" measures enacted by communities that potentially obstruct one's ability and opportunity to be supported in their walk to wellness through authenticity and belonging.

There can be tension in adhering to group roles and rules as multiple identities (self as emergent within localized contexts) revolve around performing internalized social norms poorly, or fear of failing the performance altogether (*normative control*) (Beech, 2008, White, 2008). This tension emphasizes the desire for obtaining acceptance, approval, or validation of values perceived as shared between self and other (Beech, 2008; Bradbury & Gunter, 2006; Menard-Warwick, 2007). Bradbury and Gunter (2006) describe identity as "both a sorting concept that organizes and labels but also relational and reflexive through how the person or I 'associate one*self with* something or someone else'" (p 497).

Identity is ubiquitous and emergent within each localized, contextual interaction we participate in (consciously or unconsciously); these interactions often occur with contradictory or ambiguous meanings such as desiring clear expectations but not wanting to have limits placed upon one (Bradbury & Gunter, 2006; Dickerson, 1996; Marra & Holmes, 2008; Matoesian, 2005; Menard-Warwick, 2007; Park, 2007; White, 2008). This dancing on the sometimes razor-width boundary between constraint and affordance, is part and parcel of the dialogic interplay of identity and interaction.

This experiential contextualization of co-researchers' journey to wellness illustrates the internal and external terrain one transverses through restraining and expressing multiple voices, accepting or rejecting organizational, structural, and personal roles, rules, and perspectives available. Creating who we are includes a dynamic evolution whereby localized contextual constellations align influencing an individual, the immediate group formation, and the larger social context to which they belong (Richey & Brown, 2007). This is a continuous assessment and repositioning that is influenced and transformed with every interaction.

4.3 Summary, Conclusion, and Suggestions for Future Research

The emergent themes within this study came to light through traditional qualitative means: review of the extant literature, engagement in conversational interviews, immersion into the data through typing transcription, and the analysis and thematization of the data. These themes demonstrate the co-researchers' understanding and lived experience of how one and the community-in-practice creates, perpetuates, or

destroys the opportunity to access the tools and develop the skills necessary to experience wellness.

Wellness was defined, envisioned, and prepared for in theme one, *What Is Well-Being?* with its four subthemes: *The Map to Joy, The Ideal: Unity, The Tools and Skills Necessary for Well-Being,* and *Why Are Rats Eating My Face?* Subtheme One, *The Map to Joy*, birthed four additional subthemes: *It's All Related*, *Community is an Act of Volition, Like Love, We're Sitting Up Mud, How Cool is That?* and *The Physical World.* This subtheme, with her additional subthemes, described the co-researchers' actual definitions of wellness, as opposed to their understanding of what wellness looks like under ideal circumstances. The four emergent themes indicated the interviewees' observation that wellness is multi-dimensional, what someone does in one area of life affects many other areas of life; there is an ecology of well-being. Our actions influence other beings around us, as well as, our environment. There was an overarching agreement between co-researchers that there is an intricate interconnection between our actions and our relationships.

In a similar vein in *Community is an Act of Volition, Like Love* the interviewees suggested that the community is in our everyday actions. They also suggested that individuals constitute our communities and to create or perpetuate a sense of belonging people must get out into the community and do things that encourage feeling supported! As Stewart et al. (2006) suggest communities are reflections of selves, and as such, individuals must to take care to feed and nourish one another. Stewart et al. (2006) go on to say that the quality of our interactions determines the quality of our life. This is closely

tied to the next two subthemes *We're Sitting Up Mud, How Cool is That?* and *The Physical World.* In *We're Sitting Up Mud, How Cool is That?* co-researchers discussed the emotional and spiritual aspects that contribute to why individuals would be interested in creating wellness. Those co-researchers who had specific religious beliefs described their impetus and reasoning for creating wellness within the context of their religious teachings. The other four interviewees described the same events and values in terms of ethics and personal values. All of the co-researchers described elements of *The Physical World* as both the physical environment but also as the reified social structures that act as gatekeepers to resources and oftentimes as culturally approved spaces for creating well-being. These social structures included culture, government, religion, education, marriage, and even community.

The tools and skills necessary to promote well-being and pitfalls to be aware of are represented in theme one, *The Map to Joy,* subtheme three and four, *The Tools and Skills Necessary for Well-Being* and *Why are Rats Eating My Face?* There are times that the subthemes overlap, such as between the ideal vision of wellness and the tools and skills necessary to encourage well-being. Co-researchers voiced similar tools and skills necessary for wellness: forgiveness, humility, and acceptance of diversity. These were described as celebrating our differences - using them to garner strength and perspective, being willing to apologize and to learn new things, and letting go of our perceptions of others' transgressions. The interviewees spoke fervently about what happens when we allow transgressions such as arrogance, inflexibility, bigotry, ignorance, and apathy to be

a part of a community's interactional patterns: isolation and hiding, oftentimes leading to inter-generational trauma including abuse and addiction behaviors.

As evidenced by this study, it can be difficult (if not impossible) to separate the definition or description of an experience without talking about the actions embedded within it. Hence, theme two, *The Struggle in the Search*, this theme described the co-researchers lived experiences of their respective wellness journeys. This theme has three subthemes: *Your Dad Scares Me*, *Now I Had Irrevocable Proof – I was Female! The Horror!*, and *Creating A Fortress of Well-being.*

Your Dad Scares Me bespoke of the childhood experiences of the co-researchers as they realized how their families contributed to their understanding of how the world works and the beginning notions of the difference between their family and other families. Interviewees described their familial situations and the confirmation or struggle of understanding what the differences meant. Although, for some of the co-researchers this was not a happy time in their life, the bliss of ignorance often sheltered them from the deeper struggles of identity and well-being that were about to come.

Now I Had Irrevocable Proof – I was Female! The Horror! described co-researcher's frequently painful and raw experiences between the ages of about 11 and 12 through 13 and 14. This period in their lives included the beginning of puberty, the raised awareness of the hypocrisy between adults' actions and what they said, increased social pressure for conformity, as well as, often vicious treatment from school peers. Familial lives did not appear to improve during this period – frequently conflict levels rose at

home as well. Interestingly, only one co-researcher described events occurring in high school (14 – 18 years of age).

Creating A Fortress of Well-being described the adult years of these co-researchers. Similar to Joseph Campbell's telling of *The Hero's Journey*, the adult years are where all but one interviewee described their greatest joy. Akin to the hero(ine) after the journey, now is the time to try to put all the lessons learned into action, to help others along their mythic journey to living a life worth living. The co-researchers still admit their struggles in adulthood with creating a joyful space in which to live – disputes with neighbors, various state or government agencies hindering local plans to meet local needs, and the almost constant struggle of balancing the congruency between social expectation and individual authenticity. However, most of them agreed that hurtful experiences as an adult did not feel as painful as the younger year instances. They had more tools, they knew what skills needed to be practiced – even if they themselves did not feel particularly adept at them. And, in many ways, they had come to know what to expect, the incredible warmth and giving that others could provide, as well as, the damaging isolation they could inflict, were no longer a surprise – as they were in their youth.

The dance of identity and interaction cannot be separated. Acceptance of our lived contradictory experiences, created ambiguous meanings, perpetuated tenuous and inconsistent shared meanings can be difficult at best. Like an expert violinist, who continually tunes the instrument's strings and tends the bow to create projected sounds for an audience. How people weave these orchestrated sounds, movements, instruments,

and physical environments together in accordance to the response and influence of the audience engenders the verbal and nonverbal performance of both performer and audience. These performance tensions influence the audio and visual fidelity and coherence of their conjointly co-constructed orchestration. It is in the space between the next note, the next movement, the next pause, and its evaluation (imagined or real by each party) that is what one knows as one's identity. How one comes to think and feel about that orchestration (i.e., creative cacophony, heart-warming harmony, or noxious noise) is what one knows as well-being. Both identity and well-being spring forth only through interaction with others through time and space.

In conclusion of this study, it appears from the multi-dimensionality of wellness and how it is experienced that more research should be encouraged. Spirituality is still under-researched in most well-being studies (Wills, 2009). It appears that in our own lives, as well as, in these co-researcher's lives that scholars – as human beings – have much to learn about the influence and experience of spiritual and emotional affect and action. Further research should also explore what difference there is (if any) in a person's experience of well-being and that of spirituality. Lastly, more action research in the areas regarding the teaching our children and youth better interpersonal skills, group work, and how to create a community worth living in (including resources for children and youth to utilize when they need help and support that they are not receiving at home). In addition, more participatory action research in educating adults on the influences their everyday actions.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Description of Study:

This study concerns how you understand well-being and how active you are in the community. I am a graduate student in the Department of Communication at University of Alaska Fairbanks. I am interested in your definition of well-being or wellness, and how this relates to past major life experiences.

Confidentiality:

Participating in this study is voluntary. This interview is constructed so that minimal identifying information is available. All information received will be placed in categories, thus, individual information is never revealed. All information gathered will remain confidential. Only the analyses will be presented for public viewing. The information I receive from this interview may be used in papers, publications, or presentations, however, personal information will never be presented. All information gathered from this research will be initially stored on a personal computer, data CDs, flash drives, or paper. The data can be accessed only through authorized means, including passwords and virtual private networks. After the data has been transcribed, all initial data will be destroyed (interviews). After the transcribed data has been analyzed, the paper data will be stored within the Department of Communication at University Alaska Fairbanks for five years, upon which time, it will be burned. Only myself and Dr. Jean Richey has access to this material. You are providing your consent by participating in this interview.

Risks and Benefits

Some questions in this interview may trigger upset or distress to participants. If you feel you need support from your experience in participating in this survey or interview, you may call the Health and Counseling Center at University of Alaska Fairbanks (474 - 7043) for assistance. Some of the questions in this interview may inspire you. There is no inherent physical danger for participating in this study.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this interview, please contact me, Joey Bays at jmbays@alaska.edu or at (907) 474-1876. You may also contact Dr. Richey in-person at 503 Gruening Bldg, University of Alaska Fairbanks, through e-mail at jarichey@alaska.edu , or over the telephone at (907) 474-7415.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a co-researcher, please contact the Research Coordinator in the Office of Research Integrity at (907) 474-8123. In addition, you may contact UAF's Human Resources Department at (907) 474-7400.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Describe your idea of wellness or well-being.
2. Describe how community affects one's personal well-being.
3. What groups do you consider yourself a member of today?
4. Describe the events surrounding the best period of your life.
5. Describe the events surrounding the worst period of your life.